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THE QUEEN MADE IN AUSTRALIA

JACQUELIN MAGNAY
CHRISTIANSBORG PALACE, COPENHAGEN

A highly emotional King Frederik X acceded to the Danish throne this morning, sealing the special moment with a kiss with his wife, Australian-born Queen Mary.

At the urging of an estimated 100,000 well-wishers on the streets of Copenhagen below the balcony of Christiansborg Palace, the new King turned to a laughing Mary, who was uncertain what to do. Then the couple kissed to celebrate their accession and an the extraordinary transfer of power.

The cobbled streets of Copenhagen were crammed with Danes, with celebrations centred on the Christiansborg Palace where Queen Margrethe II had minutes earlier authorised the change of head of state to Frederik, her first born, on Monday Australian time, with a simple signature.

The abdication – the first in 900 years in Denmark – was witnessed by a handful of family, Danish cabinet officials and council of state members. Margrethe left the room with tears in her eyes, saying: "God bless the king."

The new king then went on to the balcony of Christiansborg, wiping away tears, and told the crowd: "My hope is to become a unifying king of Denmark. It is a task I have approached all my life. It is a task I take on with pride and joy."

Mary, dressed in a simple white outfit, then took her place alongside her husband, and waved enthusiastically.

The rest of the family, the Crown Prince Christian, princesses Isabella and Josephine, and Prince Vincent joined them to greet the sea of people.

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Twenty-three years after meeting in Sydney, Frederik and Hobart-born Mary were proclaimed as the new king and queen of Denmark in the early hours of Monday

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- Timeline of a queen
- The new crown prince
- Devils in the detail

No means no, warns Peris on republic

EXCLUSIVE

ELLIE DUDLEY
LEGAL AFFAIRS CORRESPONDENT

Australia will never replace the British monarchy with its own head of state as long as there is a No campaign against constitutional change, the Republican Movement's co-chairwoman Nova Peris warns.

The Olympian's comments come after Anthony Albanese rebuffed calls to put a republic

Peris

referendum back on the agenda, saying it would be a "matter for Australians" if a vote was held while he was the nation's leader.

Ms Peris – an ex-Labor senator – said a republic referendum should not be held and would inevitably fail if there were a No campaign standing in the way of it. "We need a campaign where everyone says yes," she said.

She also said it was up to the leaders to come to a bipartisan agreement on a republic before it was put to a vote, saying "both people at the top need to be in agreeance with it".

FULL REPORT P5

MINISTER SAYS MISSION ABOUT 'PATHWAY OUT OF CONFLICT'

Wong won't visit site of Hamas atrocities

YONI BASHAN

Foreign Minister Penny Wong will not visit the southern Israeli towns where the October 7 massacres occurred, marking another break in Australia's position from some of its closest allies whose leaders have visited the Jewish state in the aftermath of terror group Hamas's assault.

Senator Wong will meet survivors of the terrorist attacks that sparked the war between Israel and Hamas during a tour of the Middle East slated to begin this week. But she will not follow European and British officials, her opposition counterpart Simon Birmingham or former prime minister Scott Morrison in touring the sites where the most deadly attacks were inflicted on the Jewish people since the Holocaust.

The Australian understands the Foreign Minister's decision will concern Israeli government officials, and it is likely to spark anger among Australia's Jewish community.

Senator Wong is scheduled to depart Australia on Monday for a week-long tour of the region, the first time a senior Albanese government minister has visited Israel since the events of October 7. The itinerary includes meetings with representatives in Jordan, Israel, the West Bank, and the United Arab Emirates.

It comes amid continuing military action being waged by the United States and Britain on Houthi rebels in Yemen over attacks on shipping lanes in the Red Sea, and as a second front in Israel's war on Iranian proxies threatens to open up with Hezbollah on the border with Lebanon.

Choosing not to visit the towns and villages where Hamas launched its deadliest attacks signals yet another break from Western allies on Israel, following the Albanese government's support for an immediate ceasefire at the UN General Assembly last month.

A spokeswoman for Senator Wong declined to comment on the decision, but The Australian understands time constraints prevented the Foreign Minister from touring the sites, located about a 90-minute drive from the Israeli capital, Jerusalem. Writing in The Australian on Monday, former Rudd-government minister and Labor Friends of Israel co-founder Mike Kelly said he believed it was incumbent on Senator Wong to visit the kibbutzim.

"She would gain a close, personal appreciation of the brutal, sadistic savagery and genocidal regional Islamist agenda of Hamas," Mr Kelly said, in a piece co-written with Strategic Analysis Australia senior fellow Anthony Bergin. "Having this perspective should help form a sound position on Israel's right and need to prosecute the war against Hamas and to ensure Israel, and the wider world, is never again subject to this kind of evil."

Those who have visited the communities nearly wiped out by Hamas include the European Union's chief diplomat, Josep Borrell, and British Foreign Secretary David Cameron.

Others include German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, European parliament president Roberta Metsola, Slovenian Foreign Minister Tanja Fajon, Portuguese Foreign Minister Joao Gomes Cravinho, New York Governor Kathy Hochul and former US vice-president Mike Pence.

Senator Birmingham and backbench Labor MPs Josh Burns and Michelle Ananda-Rajah also visited massacre sites last month during a joint parliamentary visit.

Mr Morrison visited sites during a joint trip with former British prime minister Boris Johnson.

Senator Wong's decision aligns with that of US Secretary of

Continued on Page 5

Britain, US deliver message to Iran in Red Sea conflict

Britain and the US have warned they will attack Houthi targets again if the Iranian-backed militants keep disrupting commercial and military ships in the Red Sea.

The US has delivered a private message to Iran about the militants it backs in Yemen.

Foreign Secretary David Cameron said Britain would "always defend the freedom of navigation" and was ready to "back words with actions".

It came after a second night of American strikes against the rebels who have been attacking vessels in the Red Sea.

Lord Cameron said Britain had issued "warning after warning", including to Iran, before taking action.

"We have sent an unambiguous message: what the Houthis are doing is wrong, and we are determined to put a stop to it. We will work with allies. We will always defend the freedom of navigation. And, crucially, we will be prepared to back words with actions," he wrote in The Sunday Telegraph.

President Joe Biden, speaking to reporters at the White House before he left for Camp David, said "we delivered (the message) privately and we're confident that we're well-prepared".

He had said on Friday he had "already delivered a message to Iran" and added that "they know not to do anything".

Mr Biden, whose administration removed the Houthis from a State Department list of "foreign terrorist organisations" in 2021, was asked by reporters whether he felt the term "terrorist" described the movement now. "I think they are," he said.

But the Iran-backed rebels have threatened a "strong and effective response" to the US strikes on a radar site on Friday night, which came a day after dozens of American and British strikes on Houthi facilities in Yemen.

FULL REPORT P8

Tax-cut windfall owed to workers

EXCLUSIVE

SIMON BENSON
POLITICAL EDITOR

Millions of average wage earners will be returned almost six years of bracket creep worth up to $1300 under the stage-three tax cuts despite unions, crossbenchers and some of Anthony Albanese's MPs calling for them to be abolished or scaled back.

New analysis of the return to taxpayers under the third stage of the Coalition's legislated reforms, has also revealed that almost 700,000 workers fall into the highest tax bracket – triple the number of those captured above the highest threshold when it was last raised to $180,001 in 2009.

But even after the stage-three tax cuts, due to come into effect on July 1, the analysis conducted by the opposition suggests the tax rates for average full-time wage earners would remain higher than they were under the Howard government.

Using both median and mean measures of average full-time wage earners dating from 2007-08, the modelling shows the effective tax rate for an average wage earner has increased substantially over the past decade due to tax brackets not keeping up with rises in income. It comes after Jim Chalmers was reported to have asked Treasury officials last year to provide advice on the impact of making changes to the tax cuts, despite the Treasurer and Anthony Albanese's election promise not to change the tax cuts.

Opponents – led by the Greens, the powerful United Workers Union and some crossbench MPs – argue that the tax cuts will cost the budget more than $230bn over the next decade.

Dr Chalmers last month addressed government MPs who had raised concerns about the tax cuts and were seeking more cost-of-living relief for lower-income households. Labor MP Jerome Laxale urged Mr Albanese to re-examine the tax cuts, with more ALP backbenchers expressing their concerns privately that more needed to be done to address the cost of living for the lowest paid.

However, the Coalition argues that the $230bn is owed to taxpayers because of bracket creep, which the stage-three cuts were designed to address.

Opposition treasury spokesman Angus Taylor called on the Prime Minister and Treasurer to "unambiguously commit" to

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THE AUSTRALIAN
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Dutton urges PM to settle port fight

GREG BROWN
RACHEL BAXENDALE

Peter Dutton has urged Anthony Albanese to personally intervene in the dispute between DP World and union workers, as industrial action is likely to lead to shutdowns of major shipping terminals for at least another week.

The Opposition Leader said the situation was becoming "more desperate as each day goes by", with DP World preparing to send home Maritime Union of Australia members who take industrial action on Monday.

Facing a war on two fronts, DP World is also being blasted by Australian traders for increasing its fees by up to 50 per cent from February.

There were complete shutdowns of DP World container terminals on Friday in Sydney, Brisbane and Fremantle, while there were partial disruptions on the company's Melbourne site.

The Australian understands DP World will not pay MUA members planning on using protected industrial action this week, with the potential for shutdowns at shipping terminals responsible for 40 per cent of Australian freight.

The MUA is banning its members from a range of measures this week, including working overtime, filling in for absent managers and taking staggered meal breaks.

The Fair Work Commission last week approved 16 hours of stop-work action for DP World workers, which may take place next month.

MUA assistant national secretary Adrian Evans said members were "available for work" on Monday, arguing DP World would be doing a disservice to Australians if the company "turn our limited bans into a lockout of its shipping clients and customers".

The Opposition Leader said further protraction of the four-month-old dispute would have a "huge negative impact on Australians and on the Australian economy".

"Companies are warning us about the impact of disruptions (to) supply chains," Mr Dutton said in Melbourne on Sunday.

"It's bad for Australian businesses because ultimately, if you don't have the goods to sell, then you aren't going to be employing staff in that business."

Workplace Relations Minister Tony Burke has resisted pleas to intervene and force the industrial umpire to make an immediate ruling on a new workplace deal, amid concerns the standoff has the potential to last another five months.

Mr Dutton said both Mr Burke and Mr Albanese should get involved in the dispute and help bring it to an end.

"Not only should Tony Burke intervene but the Prime Minister should intervene here as well," he said. "The Prime Minister has the ability to pick the phone up to (call) the union leaders to get this sorted out."

The MUA is pursuing a 16 per cent pay rise for stevedores over two years, in a deal that would see DP World staff paid nearly as much as the more productive workforce at rival Patrick Corporation.

The revised pay demand, formally lodged on the weekend, also asks for an 8 per cent sign-on bonus, a 3 per cent increase in superannuation and 0.25 per cent income protection insurance.

The company is understood to be furious with the offer and concerned the two-year length of the MUA proposal could pave the way for strike action across the nation's ports from 2025, as the enterprise agreements of the three major operators would end in the same year, allowing for multi-employer bargaining.

Freight and Trade Alliance director Paul Zalai said the continued industrial action was having "devastating financial impacts on exporters and importers".

But Mr Zalai said DP World was "rubbing salt into the wounds of our trade sector" for increasing its fees by up to 50 per cent from the beginning of February.

"DP World, without any level of consultation, has announced another surge in landside fees including exorbitant increases in terminal access charges from 1 February, 2024," Mr Zalai said.

Two dead in light plane crash

Two men are dead after a light plane crash in Queensland's Scenic Rim on Sunday.

Emergency services were called to Bruckner Hill Rd at Dugandan, near Boonah, about noon after the small plane went down metres from people on the green at Boonah Golf Club.

The plane's two occupants, a 69-year-old and an 82-year-old, could not be saved and were declared dead at the scene.

Ipswich Acting Inspector Kerry Olsen said the plane had taken off from Boonah airfield and was returning at the time it crashed.

Police do not believe a mayday call was made.

"There was a plane crash reported in the Dugandan area and tragically two people have lost their lives as a result of that crash," she said.

Mackenzie Scott

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Labor pushed to follow Britain, US on AI security standards

ROSIE LEWIS
POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

The Albanese government is being urged to align its approach on artificial intelligence with major trading partners the US and UK as it prepares to unveil plans to strengthen domestic rules around its safety and use.

Industry and Science Minister Ed Husic will this week release the government's response to a consultation paper released mid-last year on "safe and responsible" AI in Australia, with a new advisory body made up of policy and industry experts, academics and consumer rights advocates.

The group will advise the government on what legislation for high-risk AI – which negatively affects a person's safety or fundamental rights – might look like, including in healthcare and law enforcement.

The Australian understands the government will also review existing legislation and regulation that captures AI and determine where there are gaps, as well as look to international standards.

"I want to bring the best brains on AI in the country together to form this advisory body," Mr Husic told The Australian.

"The full response (to the consultation process) will unveil a suite of measures so we can get cracking on ensuring AI is developed safely and responsibly."

> 'How the UK has done it is the gold standard model. That's what we should be doing in Australia'
>
> KATE POUNDER
> TECH COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA

Key stakeholders, including the Tech Council of Australia and Law Council of Australia, have been pushing the government to set up a taskforce to provide advice on emerging technologies, while warning against following the path of the EU by developing a stand-alone AI act.

"How the UK has done it is the gold standard model," tech council chief executive Kate Pounder said.

"The UK model of going out to those regulators and saying 'where do you think AI technology will be relevant? Where do existing frameworks work? Where are there gaps? Where does the framework work but people don't know how they apply?' That's what we should be doing in Australia.

"The UK and United States have been intentional to emphasise both AI innovation and economic growth policies as well as regulation in the same breath."

The council and Microsoft say AI capable of generating text, images or other media, such as ChatGPT, could add between $45bn and $155bn a year to the Australian economy by 2030.

Mr Husic points to an estimate from consulting firm McKinsey, which says the adoption of automation technologies could add an extra $170bn to $600bn annually to GDP by 2030.

Law Council of Australia president Greg McIntyre SC said a dedicated taskforce should operate over the next 18 months to advise on a broad range of regulation, with a comprehensive set of regulations and legislation ready to be introduced in the next parliament.

"In the Law Council's view, the significant risks posed by the use of AI justify a strengthened and precautionary approach to AI regulation, where there is evidence that existing laws and regulations are insufficient to address the issues and harms arising," the law council said in its submission to the AI discussion paper.

"Further regulation should be multifaceted.

"It should include the expansion of current legislation and, where necessary, new targeted legislation, not just a soft law approach of a voluntary code."

Tax-cut windfall owed to workers

Number and % of taxpayers by income

2008-09	Number of taxpayers	% of taxpayers	2020-2021	Number of taxpayers	% of taxpayers
$6000 or less	6044	0.1	$18,200 or less	2,236,047	14.8
$6001-$34,000	2,859,699	31.3	$18,201-$45,000	4,385,353	29
$34,001-$80,000	4,868,824	53.2	$45,001-$120,000	6,736,313	44.5
$80,001-$180,000	1,227,804	13.4	$120,001-$180,000	1,150,084	7.8
$180,001 or more	184,167	2.0	$180,001 or more	626,392	4.1
TOTAL	9,146,538	100	TOTAL	15,134,189	100

Effective tax rates for average incomes

	2007-08		2016-17		2023-24		2024-25	
	Income	Rate	Income	Rate	Income	Rate	Income	Rate
Top bracket	$150,000	45%	$180,001	45%	$180,001	45%	$200,001	45%
Third bracket	$75,001	40%	$87,001	37%	$120,001	37%	$45,001	30%
Second bracket	$30,001	30%	$37,001	32.5%	$45,001	32.5%	$18,201	19%
First bracket	$6001	15%	$18,201	19%	$18,201	19%	-	-
Tax-free threshold	$1	0%	$1	0%	$1	$0	$1	$0
Median annual full-time wage. ABS employee earnings. August 2023	$43,680	17.6%	$65,000	19.49%	$83,200	21.04%	$83,200	19.89%
Mean annual full-time wage. ABS employee earnings. August 2023	$57,614.40	20.63%	$78,274.60	21.70%	$98,050.20	22.78%	$98,050.20	21.42%

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australian Taxation Office

Continued from Page 1

delivering the tax cuts. "For average wage earners, this is returning part of what's been stolen from them through bracket creep," Mr Taylor told The Australian.

"Bracket creep is like the thief in the night. It is the tax increase Australians never voted for.

"The stage-three tax cuts are a good start, but the average wage earner is still worse off than they were under the Howard government.

"In Labor's first 18 months in office, income taxes have gone up by over 27 per cent according to National Accounts data. It is clear Labor wants to tax their way out of inflation and Australian families are paying the price."

Bracket creep has been a significant component of the increased income tax revenue that has helped the Albanese government in delivering a budget surplus.

The median full-time wage in 2007-08 was $43,680, and under the tax rates at the time the effective tax rate was just 17.6 per cent.

This year, the median full-time wage earner on $83,200 faces an effective tax rate of 21.04 per cent. Under stage three, the same salary would be taxed at an effective rate of 19.89 per cent.

The mean full-time wage in 2007-08 was $57,614 with an effective tax rate of 20.63 per cent.

In 2023 the mean full-time wage was $98,050 which attracted an effective tax rate of 22.78 per cent. Under stage 3, the effective tax rate for the average earner would be 21.42 per cent, according to the analysis. A median full-time wage earner will receive $955 in tax relief while the mean full-time wage earner will receive $1326 in relief.

Critics of the tax cuts, which would only go some way to returning bracket creep to medium income earners, have argued that the greatest benefit under stage three would go the highest income earners.

The stage-three tax cuts abolish the 37 per cent tax bracket and cut the 32.5 per cent rate to 30 per cent for all workers on incomes between $45,000 and $200,000. Those on wages slightly above the median at $100,000 would save $1375 in tax.

This rises to almost $4000 for those on wages of $150,000 and just over $6000 for people earning more than $180,000, which by 2030 could be close to one million workers.

Those on salaries of more than $200,000 would still pay the highest tax rate of 45 per cent but would benefit from tax savings of $9075.

The Coalition argues that the top tax bracket has remained unchanged at $180,001 since 2008-09, when Kevin Rudd matched John Howard and Peter Costello's promised tax cuts.

At that time, the threshold captured 184,167 Australian earners which was the equivalent of 2 per cent of taxpayers.

Tax data from 2020-21, however, shows that number or workers paying the top tax rate had more than tripled since then to 626,392, and now represented more than 4 per cent of total taxpayers. The first two stages offered tax relief for low- to middle-income earners.

It is the benefit to high-income earners under stage three that Labor initially objected to before the 2019 election. However, under Mr Albanese's leadership, the party pledged to support the cuts and not repeal them in government.

Some economists, including HSBC and respected independent economist Chris Richardson, have warned that the timing of the tax cuts could add inflationary pressure by pumping $21bn gradually back into the economy over the course of the following 12 months. This, they claim, could prompt the Reserve Bank of Australia, to delay cutting interest rates that were predicted to start falling again in the second half of the year.

This has been disputed by other economists, such as JP Morgan, which has released analysis showing the tax cuts would have a negligible effect on inflation.

Dr Chalmers has claimed that Treasury has not provided analysis on any inflationary impacts of the tax cuts. However, it is implied that the tax cuts have been already factored into the department's forecasts for inflation.

The Treasurer has also said that bracket creep was a priority for the government in assessing fairness in the tax system.

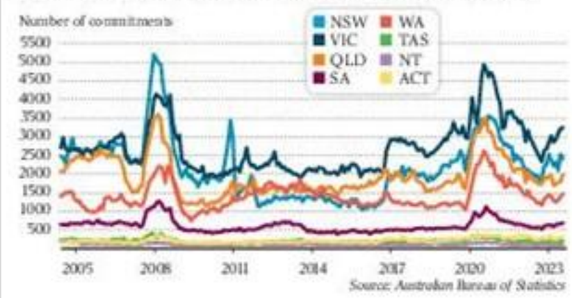
Treasury's forecasts for moderating inflation were more optimistic than the central bank, even when the tax cuts were taken into account.

"Whether it's the Treasury or the Reserve Bank or others, they factor in the changes to the tax system when they come up with their forecasts for inflation," Dr Chalmers said last week.

Mr Albanese, however, has again raised suspicions about the government's intention on the tax cuts, last week refusing to provide a "promise" that they would go ahead without amendment.

Spike in property market entrants

NEW LOANS FOR FIRST-HOME BUYERS BY STATE



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

MACKENZIE SCOTT

The desire to exit the tight rental market helped to drive a rise in Australians opting to become homeowners last year.

Cost-of-living pressure and increasing interest rates slashed the amount buyers could borrow by about a third, but the number of first-home buyers rose by 20.3 per cent over the year to November 2023, the latest Australian Bureau of Statistics data shows.

First-time purchasers are also borrowing more to keep up with rising property prices, now taking on an average mortgage of $505,000, a near record high.

Melbourne-based buyers agent Cate Bakos said many young people were becoming sick of renting and, with secure employment and occasional help from the Bank of Mum and Dad, were able to get on to the property ladder.

"The dominant reason is they are not enjoying being renters," Ms Bakos said.

"They are looking at it and saying, if I can do anything to get into the market and avoid getting kicked out of my rental and dealing with consistent rent hikes, than I'll do so."

Rental conditions have been chronically tight for several years. While recent data from housing researcher PropTrack has shown a loosening of the rental vacancy rate to 1.2 per cent nationally, weekly rents in Australia rose 11.5 per cent through 2023 to a median of $580 each week.

The number of first-home buyers across the country is considerably lower than in 2021 when activity peaked due to access to cheap money.

In November, the biggest increase in first-home-buyer activity was seen in Queensland, up 10.8 per cent on the previous month, and the ACT, up 14.2 per cent. Western Australian numbers were up 4.7 per cent on the previous month, as they were in South Australia (up 3.5 per cent) and Victoria (up 1.2 per cent).

But in Tasmania, where property prices are still falling, there was a considerable drop in market entrants, down a whopping 34.1 per cent in November on the previous month.

NSW and the Northern Territory also declined, down 4.8 per cent and 1.4 per cent respectively.

Real Estate Institute of Australia president Leanne Pilkington said governments should be doing more.

The Queensland peak real estate body, the REIQ, last week called for the stamp duty concession in the state to be lifted for the first time in over a decade in response to soaring property prices, as was the case in NSW.

"It is great most of the states have got stamp duty concessions of one type or another, but the buffers at which they check out are too low in most places," Ms Pilkington said.

Ms Bakos said the federal government's First Home Guarantee, which facilitates the purchase of a home with a 5 per cent deposit, remains popular with market entrants.

The federal government will look to help boost the availability of social and affordable homes from Monday, when applications open for the first round of funding from the $10bn Housing Australia Future Fund and the National Housing Accord to help fund the construction of properties 40,000 properties.

Sudanese teen murder accused has gang ties

LIAM MENDES

A man set to be extradited to the Northern Territory over the murder of a Sudanese teenager has ties to one of Victoria's most notorious African youth gangs and had been arrested over a planned fight at a Melbourne festival in 2019.

Koang Wuordol, 22, faced the Melbourne Bail and Remand Court on Sunday after he was arrested on Saturday morning.

Mr Wuordol, who has an extensive history in the Victorian court system, will be charged with murder in the NT on Monday after the extradition request was granted.

The Territory resident is the fourth person arrested over the murder, with a 17, 20 and 21-year-old arrested earlier last week after Yiel Gatluak's discarded body was found on the outskirts of Alice Springs on New Year's Day.

The 17 and 21-year-old are expected to be charged with accessory after the fact (murder) and are expected to also face court on Monday. The 20-year-old has been released pending further investigations.

In 2019 it was reported that Mr Wuordol was one of 16 males charged over a planned fight at the family-friendly White Night festival in the Melbourne CBD between gang Next Gen Shooters, based in the southeast and west-based rivals Blood Drill Killers.

The "retaliation fight" was planned on social media after it was alleged Mr Wuordol and 20-plus "African males" from the Next Gen Shooters forced entry into a "community cafe" in the inner-west suburb of Footscray.

Mr Wuordol, who was 18 at the time, was charged with affray and violent disorder for his part in which members of the gang allegedly "armed with sharpened sticks, metal poles and kitchen knives" assaulted four people and caused damage to the premises, Dandenong Magistrates Court was told.

The Next Gen Shooters gang, also known as 710, has previously taunted police through social media to boast about "killing for fun" and making "cases pile up".

A vigil was held on Sunday night in Melbourne, where Mr Gatluak was born and his family lives.

"Yiel was a wonderful and a loving son, brother, nephew, uncle, cousin and a true friend to many, who touched the lives of those around him," Nyakuoar Gatluak wrote on a GoFundMe page set up to raise money for funeral costs.

Inspirational skipper at the top of her game

JOANNA PANAGOPOULOS

Cricketer Alyssa Healy debuted in India last month as captain of the most successful team in Australian sport, and she hasn't taken up the job lightly.

She also led Australia to a series win over India in the third and final Twenty20 International last week.

Healy knew she wanted to play cricket before she knew an Australian women's team existed.

"We hadn't been exposed to women's cricket yet. I was playing with the boys and thought that was just what you did," she told The Australian from Mumbai last month.

"I was watching uncle Ian (Healy) on the telly and thinking, 'That must be so cool'. But I didn't know an Australian women's team was doing some amazing things in their own right. It wasn't until I actually went and watched them play that I knew they existed."

So the captaincy of the Australia women's national cricket team, for an uninhibited opening batter and wicketkeeper, means a lot.

"I just wanted to get it right. Respect the position and everyone in the team by doing it properly. It was a great chance to talk to the group about who I am, and who I want to be as a leader, and what I see as being important on this tour. The girls have been super-respectful and supportive and all those worries I had are gone now. The captaincy means a lot to me."

She joins an illustrious list of Australian T20 skippers that includes Belinda Clark, Karen Rolton, Alex Blackwell and Meg Lanning.

But even when she wasn't captain, Healy led the team in her own way, supporting players and helping them to enjoy the game.

The Australian side has won the most World Cups, T20 World Cups, Ashes series, trans-Tasman battles and other trophies, as well as last year's Commonwealth Games gold medal and holds the record for most consecutive ODI victories.

Healy does her best to savour every moment of that immense achievement.

"I make a really conscious effort to relish every single day with this team because without sounding weird about it, we're all so grateful for the opportunities we get. We want to win, we want to compete, but we want to have a good time while we're doing it," she previously told The Australian.

She also plays for NSW and the Sydney Sixers in the WBBL.

THE AUSTRALIAN
2023 Australian of the Year

How to nominate the 2023 Australian of the Year

Post
The Editor
The Australian
GPO Box 4162
Sydney 2001

Website or the app
www.theaustralian.com.au

Email
aaoty@theaustralian.com.au

Correspondence should be headed: **The Australian of the Year**
*Please include your name and contact details**

The winner will be announced in The Weekend Australian on Saturday, January 20, 2024

* This information is collected solely for this award and will not be used for any other purpose

GETTY IMAGES
Captain Alyssa Healy

Healy first made history at 16 when became the first female to play in an elite Sydney private school cricket competition, joining the 2006 Barker College first XI.

In April 2022, she rewrote the history books again when she hammered 170 from 138 balls in the World Cup final against England at Christchurch. It was the highest score in a World Cup final, male or female.

Her achievements in cricket have earned her a nomination for The Australian's Australian of the Year, an award for national achievement chosen annually by the newspaper since 1971.

Indigenous mother wins adoption appeal

EXCLUSIVE

ELLIE DUDLEY
JOANNA PANAGOPOULOS

An Aboriginal mother has won an appeal against a decision granting a British couple responsibility of her two children who have been living in the UK for nearly four years, in the latest court challenge regarding the care of Indigenous children whose biological parents are deemed unfit to care for them.

The Wiradjuri mother had applied to appeal a decision that gave parental responsibility for her two teenage children to the British couple, known as Ms M and Mr L, who had taken them to Britain.

The children were taken from the mother into the care of the state in 2010 because of "serious concerns" regarding her parenting capacity. They were then handed through multiple carers, and attempts were made to settle them permanently with a maternal aunt.

In 2015 it became increasingly difficult to find the children a permanent home and they risked being separated. However, Ms M, who was familiar with them from her work through an Aboriginal charity agency, offered to take them both in and, with Mr L, became authorised carers for the children.

Mr L's visa expired in 2019, and Ms M's a year after, requiring them to return to Britain. With the court's consent, Ms M travelled to the UK with the children in mid-2020, with the expectation to return a few months later.

But when the Covid-19 pandemic hit all four remained overseas, and have not returned.

Before Ms M and the children left Australia, the mother applied to the Children's Court for the return of parental responsibility. Ms M and Mr L applied separately, seeking responsibility themselves.

In June 2022 the Children's Court granted parental responsibility of the children partially to the state, which would control the children's religious and cultural upbringing, and partially to Ms M and Mr L, who would provide a home for the children, and control their education and medical treatments.

However, last month the mother successfully appealed these orders, on the basis that the Children's Court did not have the jurisdiction to grant parental responsibility while the children are in Britain, and the decision was quashed.

It is unclear whether the children will be returned to Australia, or if the NSW Communities and Justice Secretary will appeal the decision to the High Court.

The case follows extensive reporting in The Australian of cases regarding whether Aboriginal children can be adopted by their long-term, white foster families due to NSW laws requiring, at first preference, they be adopted by someone of the Aboriginal community to which their birth parent belongs. If not practicable, the child can be placed with an adoptive parent from another Aboriginal community. Only if that is not feasible may the child be adopted by non-Aboriginal parents.

The Australian revealed last March that the adoption by long-term foster parents of Aboriginal siblings "Mary" and "Michael" was being blocked by their mother, who believed her children should not be permanently placed with a "non-Aboriginal family (who) wouldn't understand the Aboriginal culture".

A month later, in a separate case, Aboriginal teenager "Richard" made an impassioned plea to a judge to approve his adoption by his white foster parents, saying "no one is listening" to him.

Both cases were eventually resolved, with the NSW Supreme Court granting the adoptions.

SNAICC, the national voice for Indigenous children, said Aboriginal children were most commonly removed from their parents due to a "lack of supports provided to families to address the challenges they face and underlying issues such as homelessness, poverty and mental health concerns".

"The most effective and immediate action the government can make to ensure the safety and protection of our children is to stand up a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Commissioner, with the legislated power to investigate and make recommendations on issues impacting our children," SNAICC CEO Catherine Liddle said.

Globe winners in Emmy spotlight

ANGIE RAPHAEL

Aussie television stars Sarah Snook and Elizabeth Debicki will be hoping to add Emmy Awards to their recent Golden Globe wins for Succession and The Crown, respectively, but both are facing stiff competition.

The 75th annual Emmy Awards ceremony, to be hosted by Anthony Anderson on Tuesday Australian time, comes after a delay due to the highly publicised strike action late last year.

Snook is nominated for outstanding lead female actor in a drama series for her celebrated performance in the critically acclaimed Succession.

She is competing against New Zealand actor Melanie Lynskey (Yellowjackets), Bella Ramsey (The Last of Us), Elisabeth Moss (The Handmaid's Tale), Sharon Horgan (Bad Sisters) and Keri Russell (The Diplomat).

At the Golden Globes, Snook took out the award for best performance by a female actor in a

Snook

television drama series. In her acceptance speech, she said Succession had changed her life.

"Everybody in it is amazing. The cast, the crew were fantastic, this was a team effort. It was always a team and that was what made the show amazing to be a part of," she said.

Debicki won a Golden Globe for a supporting role on television in The Crown playing the late Princess Diana.

Her Emmy nomination is also for supporting female actor in a drama series.

The first-time nominee faces competition from The White Lotus actors Jennifer Coolidge, Meghann Fahy, Sabrina Impacciatore, Aubrey Plaza and Simona Tabasco, as well as Rhea Seehorn (Better Call Saul) and J. Smith-Cameron (Succession).

Fellow Aussie actor Murray Bartlett scored two nominations, including one as a supporting actor in a limited or anthology series or movie for Welcome to Chippendales. The other was as a guest actor in a drama series for The Last of Us, but he already lost to Nick Offerman.

Anna Torv was nominated as a guest female actor in a drama series for The Last of Us but lost out to Storm Reid.

Succession leads Emmy nominations with 27, followed by The Last of Us with 24, The White Lotus 23 and Ted Lasso 21.

'Forgotten in a paradise lost to disaster'

BRIAN CASEY

Bill and Michelle Dunn at Degarra on the Bloomfield River on Sunday amid the aftermath of Cyclone Jasper

EXCLUSIVE

MICHAEL McKENNA
QUEENSLAND EDITOR

It is the tiny little rainforest town that locals say has been forgotten in its moment of need.

Almost a month after raging waters swamped Degarra, nestled on the banks of the Bloomfield River in Cape York, its 45 permanent inhabitants are still clearing the tangle of debris, sleeping under tarps and waiting for the return of power, water and sewage to their broken homes.

Australian Defence Force personnel, deployed last week at the request of the region's mayors, have yet to appear and bureaucratic caution over insurance is being blamed for redirecting the arrival of caravans for temporary accommodation to a park a few hours' walk away.

They are no cars left working in the cut-off community, which has had to rely on an old speedboat to make runs up the river to Cooktown in the past few weeks to get supplies. It is a situation that on Sunday brought Michelle Dunn, 58, to tears as she struggled with the enormity of the clean-up and rebuild that remains ahead of her and husband, Billy, 73.

"I can't keep doing this anymore, it's too hard," she said.

"I didn't expect any help, (but) I just need some help."

The couple, who have lived in the community for more than three decades, are lucky to be alive. Neighbour Ray Dark, 85, is missing and believed to have been swept to his death.

After almost 2m of rain fell in the wake of Cyclone Jasper, the river broke its banks and began rushing into their home in the dead of night on Sunday, December 17.

Mr Dunn said the flood waters rose a "a foot every 10 minutes," forcing them to swim out of their kitchen window and, using sheets they had earlier cut and wound into a rope, he was able to tie himself to a tree as he clung on to his wife. With the waters rising above them and exhausted, they then decided to "say their goodbyes" and let themselves drift away into the torrent.

Miraculously, both were swept to another tree, and they managed to climb the branches and sit above the floodwaters for the next 10 hours until they were rescued by another local in a tinnie.

Since then, Mr Dunn said that locals, with some belated help in recent days from SES volunteers, have had to fend for themselves.

"It feels like we have been the forgotten town," he said about the community where some of the 16 flooded homes were completely submerged by water.

"There have been helicopter visits and flyovers by politicians (including Queensland Premier Steven Miles and Prime Minister Anthony Albanese) but we would have preferred they bring supplies and more help".

The nearby Aboriginal community of Wujal Wujal has been evacuated, with many of the homes knocked off their foundations by the deluge that smashed the region.

Michael Kerr, who is mayor of the Douglas Shire Council in which Degarra is located, said the residents "are at a breaking point".

"We don't want to point fingers here but we need the assistance that was promised for the residents," he said.

"A month has passed since the disaster and it's been seven days since the approvals were done and we have yet to see the assistance coming through. It's crazy that we are able to provide disaster assistance to countries overseas within a couple of days yet our own residents are still waiting this long to get help."

A spokesman for state Disaster Recovery Minister Nikki Boyd said the Queensland Recovery Authority "continues to work closely with a number of communities in Douglas shire including Degarra".

"There are a number of impacted communities. Temporary housing with connections to services such as water and sewerage is being placed to assist as many people as possible," he said.

"The QRA has confirmed a number of funding options are available for councils to provide solutions such as transport from temporary accommodation while the QRA continues to investigate solutions for Degarra that overcome geography and weather."

Tourism operators hold breath for highway reopening

The Captain Cook Highway, the main road connection between the far north Queensland towns of Cairns and Port Douglas, is scheduled to reopen next weekend, but tourism operators are concerned continued heavy rain may slow repairs.

Saturday will mark five weeks since the devastating flooding of Tropical Cyclone Jasper caused significant landslips on either side of the town of Wangetti.

For tourism operators such as Angela and Peter Freeman, who rely on the coastal highway, the reopening can't come soon enough.

The Freemans' business, Hartley's Croc Adventures, has been shut since the flooding began. Their self-professed frugal lifestyle has allowed them to continue paying staff from their own pocket. That is now starting to run dry.

"We are using the Peter and Angela retirement fund, which was completely depleted by Covid," Ms Freeman said.

But a monsoon trough hovering since Wednesday threatens to disrupt repairs progress and push back the scheduled date, which was always dependent on the weather.

Over the three days to Sunday morning, Port Douglas was smashed by 267mm of rain, while Daintree Village further north had a 357mm downpour.

Closures mean the Freemans missed out on the summer high season, with February and March typically the quietest months of the year.

"That's the thing that hurts the most," Mr Freeman said. "Boxing Day through to New Year's Day is the busiest week of the year ... we get 1500 people per day."

Neighbouring Turtle Cove Resort at Wangetti has a similar story. The LGBTQIA+ adults-only getaway spot attempted to drive guests in early on, but that proved unsustainable due to repairs. General manager Nathan Bonneau-Plassa said forward bookings are highly dependent on events, with a big party planned for the Australia Day long weekend.

"We've got a rough six months ahead of us to gain back what we lost," he said.

"We're not asking for a handout. We've been supporting our community for 30 years and now we're really asking for you to support the business."

Since the Captain Cook Highway closed, tourists and locals travelling between Cairns and Port Douglas have had to make a 2½-hour drive through Mareeba and Kuranda or pay $50 each way for a ferry.

MACKENZIE SCOTT

Demon's focus is at stake, says Newk

WILL SWANTON

John Newcombe is worried about Alex de Minaur. Optimistic, but worried.

"This is new territory for Alex," Newcombe says before de Minaur's first-round Australian Open match against Canadian Milos Raonic on Monday night.

"He's never received this much attention. Never been under this sort of spotlight. It's pretty heady stuff and he's never had to deal with it before. He's in terrific form but I just think he's got to be careful."

Why? Because he's getting nearly as much publicity as Crown Princess Mary of Denmark. "You have your face all over the newspapers and TV every day and night," Newcombe says. "That can be dangerous. You start feeling a pressure to live up to everyone's expectations. It's the first time he's been in this position and I just worry about all this attention he's suddenly getting."

The legendary Newcombe hopes as feverishly as anyone for the 24-year-old to go deep in the draw at Melbourne Park. "But we can't be looking too far ahead," he says. "He's going particularly well, he's in the top 10 for the first time and he's coming off some big wins. But all this focus on him, I'm wary of how it can affect you. It takes some getting used to. Everyone wants your photo. Everyone wants to talk to you, interview you – it can be hard to escape all that and get your mind on the job. Alex can have a great tournament but it's the old adage of one match at a time. He has a reasonably hard match first-up. One at a time, that's his go."

A steak a day – that's how de Minaur's towering opponent has returned to his fighting weight. Raonic restricted himself to eating nothing but one meal a day; a good old slab of steak, until he

MICHAEL KLEIN
Alex de Minaur on Sunday

shed 20kg and was fit enough to professional tennis following a three-year hiatus. He'll attempt to devour de Minaur in prime-time at Melbourne Park.

It's an intriguing contest. The in-form, in-your-face de Minaur against the loping, laid-back, powerful Raonic. The Canadian is a former World No. 3 and Wimbledon finalist. He's slimmed down again but fitness remains his concern. Raonic doesn't have many good matches in him at the Open – but he could lift for a big one. This one.

De Minaur had Court 8 packed 10-deep for his training session on Sunday afternoon. He had a decent hitting partner: Lleyton Hewitt. The ex-Wimbledon champion still hits a smooth and clean ball. De Minaur was getting the rock star treatment – can we get a photo? Can you sign our giant fluffy souvenir tennis ball? – but he was pretty nonchalant about it all. He looks in good nick. Could do some damage. If he can keep his head amid the new-found hype.

"I'm a person that's not easily distracted," de Minaur says. "There's been a lot of focus but at the same time I'm still putting my head down and I'm still getting all the work that I need to.

SPORT P21

Sam swaps flicks into the net for her Netflix

JESSICA HALLORAN

Matildas star Sam Kerr has emerged from knee surgery upbeat and requesting Netflix recommendations as she starts her long journey back to the field.

Kerr was dealt the cruellest of blows, one certain to end her Paris Olympic dreams, when she tore her anterior cruciate ligament during a warm weather training camp in Morocco last week.

In her first foray on to Instagram since she had surgery, the 30-year-old appeared with her right leg bandaged and smiling with two thumbs up with the message "on the road to recovery" and asked her 1.8 million followers for shows to watch.

As people recommended TV series like Boy Swallows Universe, Lessons in Chemistry, Derry Girls, other fans jokingly suggested the documentary Matildas: The World At Our Feet.

The star striker received support from Matildas teammates Mackenzie Arnold, Hayley Raso and Ellie Carpenter, her Chelsea teammate Millie Bright, as well as encouragement from high-profile athletes such as English footballer Jesse Lingard and Aussie cricketer David Warner.

"Hope recovery goes well," wrote Warner.

While Kerr's Chelsea contract is up at the end of the season, it's understood she remains in talks about re-signing to the English Women's Super League team.

Several days ago Chelsea manager Emma Hayes, who will soon take charge of the US women's football team, revealed the way Kerr had hurt herself was during an innocuous drill.

Matildas star Sam Kerr

"She did it doing a football action she does every day; turning and shooting. It's something very simple and innocuous," she told Sky Sports. "I'm gutted for her, I'm gutted for the team."

As the women's game rises, and workloads and travel increases, ACLs have felled some big names in the game.

Kerr is not the first star international female footballer to be felled by an ACL injury in recent times. England's Beth Mead and Leah Williamson, the Netherlands' Vivianne Miedema and Canada's Janine Beckie all missed the World Cup in Australia because of ACL injuries.

Global soccer players' union FIFPRO released new research last December which indicated that increased demands on professional women's football players has resulted in a notable increase in knee, thigh, hamstring and ACL injuries.

The analysis shows that elite women players who sustained ACL injuries made more appearances and had more instances of less than five days between matches.

'It's what we do': surf iron stars in mass rescue of kids, tourists

AMANDA LULHAM

Australia's top surf lifesavers were involved in a mass rescue of swimmers — including children — swept out to sea at Maroubra on Sunday, just minutes after they had finished racing a round of the Nutri-Grain surf ironman and ironwoman series.

Women's winner Lana Rogers heard the rescue call go out on the radio around 3pm and immediately started to swim out to the swimmers in distress.

Newport's Jackson Borg was with fellow surf lifesaver and kayaker Jimmy Walker, who saw the start of the rescue from the sand, with the pair also rushing to help the distressed swimmers.

The mass rescue by surf lifesavers at Maroubra on Sunday

Surf Life Saving Australia national sports manager Wayne Druery said 25 people were involved in the drama, triggered by a "freak rip" which dragged them down the beach and out to sea.

"There were about 20 or 30 people, but they are all fine thankfully," Rogers said.

"I just heard "rescue, rescue, rescue' on the radio and immediately we all just responded. It's what we do. It happened quickly and everyone just reacted."

Rogers said it was the first time in 12 years of patrols she has been involved in a rescue.

"I only played a small part and we're just happy everyone is OK," she said.

Druery said four swimmers required medical assistance when they were returned to shore.

He confirmed most of the swimmers were tourists, including some from Ireland, who had been swimming between the flags but were dragged out to sea by the rip.

"It's what we do, but I've never seen such a mass rescue during competitions" Druery said

"Our safety officer Adrian Hill got alerted to it and two competition IRBS responded, along with the lifeguards, the patrols and our athletes, who all got on boards and tubes. Four were treated by first aid, but thankfully there's no major injuries."

"It was just a freak movement of fast water back out to sea that caught them."

Druery said because they were near the flags, personnel on the beach were able to see them and respond immediately.

"Who knows what could have happened if they were further away," he said.

Jackson Borg, one of the stars of the ironman racing on Sunday, played a major role in the rescue and was one of the first to reach swimmers.

"We were just standing round talking and Jimmy (Walker) looked across and saw a mass rescue, that people needed help, and everyone just grabbed boards," Borg said.

Offline tower fuels power risks

EXCLUSIVE

RACHEL BAXENDALE
VICTORIAN POLITICAL REPORTER

A coal-fired power station tower that provides at least 5 per cent of Victoria's electricity was offline four times in four days last week, following an eight-day outage over the new year period.

While the outages coincided with cool weather and did not result in a blackout, large energy users say they highlight the perilous nature of state's power grid, which is still dependent on fossil fuels – predominantly high emissions brown coal – for more than 60 per cent of generation.

Energy Users Association chief executive Andrew Richards said the risk of blackouts has been compounded by the Allan government's ideological opposition to using lower-emissions gas as a transition fuel, amid delays in renewable energy coming online.

Victoria's renewable energy plans suffered a significant blow last week after federal Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek's decision to veto the state government's proposal for a renewable energy terminal at the Port of Hastings, which was to serve as a platform for the construction of the state's offshore wind industry.

Paul McArdle, a close observer of the national electricity market, revealed the outages on his Watt-Clarity blog, showing the unit went offline four times between last Monday and Thursday, following its eight-day outage between December 29 and January 6.

Mr McArdle said the tower is one of four at Loy Yang A – currently providing 20 to 28 per cent of Victoria's power, despite being slated to close in 2035 – meaning the tower alone is responsible for generating 5 to 7 per cent of the state's energy.

Mr Richards said the outages highlighted the perilous state of the grid, with the possibility of blackouts during a heatwave.

He said they were more likely to occur at night, when solar generation was unable to fill the gap.

"The last couple of summers have been pretty mild by Australian standards, and it's allowed us to skate through, but if we have an extended period of really hot weather and hot nights, and as people are coming back to work and getting back to business, that culmination of things can create some pretty hairy situations," Mr Richards said.

The chief of the body representing Australia's largest industrial energy users said the outages showed the role gas could be playing in providing a lower-emissions transition fuel.

"If gas was playing a bigger role in Victoria, then you'd be closing down old, dirty coal-fired power stations much sooner, and that would have a net positive outcome, because gas is less emissions-intensive than brown coal," Mr Richards said.

"That's the ironic thing with the Victorian approach; they're demonising gas, and that's forcing more coal to be burnt, which is a net negative for the environment."

Mr Richards pointed to the Australian Energy Market Operator's draft integrated system plan, released last month, which warned that Australia will need to significantly increase its gas usage to ensure the grid remains reliable amid the transition to renewables, with 16GW of gas-powered generation capacity needed by 2050, up from the 10GW AEMO previously predicted.

"For the transition to succeed, lights must be kept on and the gas flowing while the new system is put in place," the report said.

Mr Richards said the "rooftop revolution" of solar generation was "hurting" all large-scale generators, whether renewable or fossil fuel, by creating negative pricing in the middle of the day.

"It's why we're seeing some of these fossil-fuel generators becoming less reliable, because there's less money around for them to spend on maintenance," he said.

A spokeswoman for Victorian Energy Minister Lily D'Ambrosio said Victoria was transitioning to renewables because the state's "ageing" coal-fired generators were becoming "increasingly unreliable". "The (State Electricity Commission)'s initial $1bn investment will accelerate the build of 4.5GW of new generation and storage – the equivalent replacement capacity of Loy Yang A," the spokeswoman said.

"Victoria remains a net exporter of energy in the National Electricity Market and our record investment in renewables combined with AEMO's reserve capacity will ensure we have sufficient supply to meet any increased demand this summer.

"Historically, gas has only provided about 5 per cent of Victoria's electricity needs and along with big batteries, will continue to play a role in energy peaking demand as we move towards 95 per cent renewable energy generation by 2035."

'Local champion' to fly flag for Libs

RACHEL BAXENDALE

Conroy

The Liberal Party has preselected a 31-year-old Frankston mayor who grew up in social housing in the Irish city of Cork to go head to head with Labor candidate Jodie Belyea, a local charity founder and former TAFE teacher, in the crucial Dunkley by-election.

Opposition Leader Peter Dutton visited the outer southeastern Melbourne suburb on Sunday to announce Nathan Conroy's candidacy, praising him as a "local champion" and young family man perfectly placed to fight for the people of Dunkley in Canberra.

In a preselection contest decided after just one round of voting by party members on Sunday morning, Mr Conroy edged out Donna Hope (nee Bauer), a former state MP for the local seat of Carrum, who works for state MP Chris Crewther, and fellow Crewther staffer and former Carrum candidate Bec Buchanan.

The by-election was prompted by the tragic death from cancer in December of popular Labor MP Peta Murphy, who held Dunkley with a 6.27 per cent margin. A date is yet to be set by Speaker Milton Dick, but it is not expected to be held before late February.

Asked how he would ensure the Liberal Party achieves a better result than it did in April's Aston by-election – which saw it lose the outer eastern Melbourne seat held for 13 years by former cabinet minister Alan Tudge with a 6.4 per cent swing to Labor's Mary Doyle – Mr Dutton said the people of Dunkley could "send a message" to Prime Minister Anthony Albanese.

"This government came into power with a promise to reduce electricity prices by $275. In fact, the Prime Minister promised that on 97 occasions, and yet since then we know that power prices have gone up by 23 per cent, and under this government, workers are paying 27 per cent more in tax, and so the family budget just doesn't add up.

"I think they'll send a clear message that they want a local champion who will listen and work hard for them and represent their interests in Canberra, and that candidate is Nathan Conroy."

The Opposition Leader said he intended to be campaigning in Dunkley "with bells on" between now and polling day.

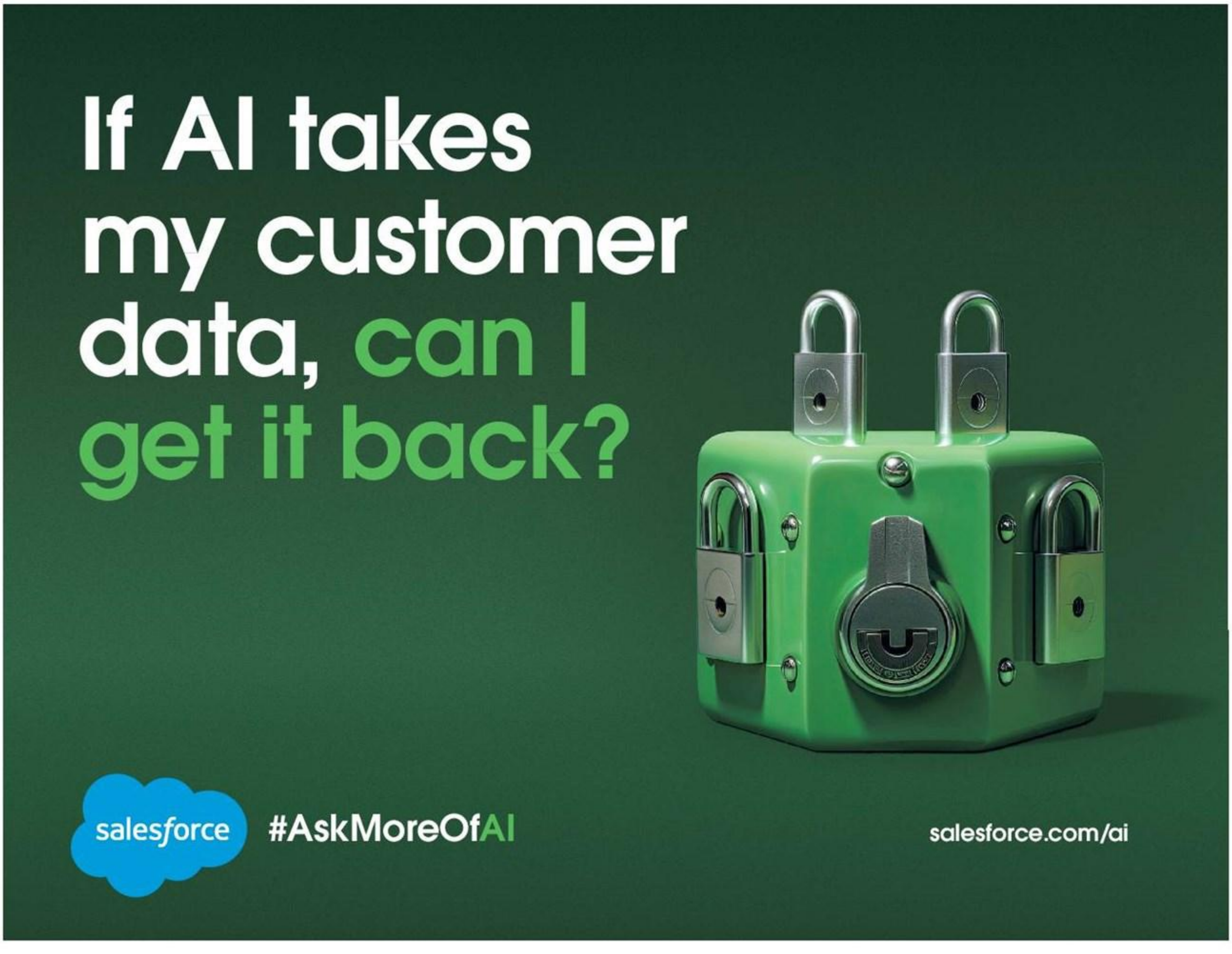
Mr Conroy – who renounced his Irish citizenship last year – said he had spent most of his 12 years in Australia living in Dunkley with his wife, Steffie, who was born and raised in the local suburb of Carrum Downs.

"The cost-of-living crisis is real. People are actually choosing between bills and food," the twice-elected mayor said. "When I grew up in social housing in the '90s, the struggle was real then. It shouldn't be the case now, and more and more we see it.

"My job is as a community advocate ... So over this election period, please come up, please talk to me, because I want to take this fight to Canberra."

State party president Philip Davis said Mr Conroy would be a "strong voice" for local families struggling with rising living costs.

"This is an opportunity to send a message to a government that has been focusing on the wrong priorities and must do better to tackle rising costs felt throughout our community," Mr Davis said.



No means no: voice vote to haunt republic

EXCLUSIVE

ELLIE DUDLEY
LEGAL AFFAIRS CORRESPONDENT

Australia will never replace the British monarchy with its own head of state as long as there is a No campaign against constitutional change, the Republican Movement's co-chairwoman, Nova Peris, warns.

The former Olympian and ex-Labor senator's comments come as Anthony Albanese rebuffs calls to put a republic referendum back on the agenda, saying it would be a "matter for Australians" if a vote were held while he was the nation's leader.

In an exclusive interview with The Australian, Ms Peris said it was disappointing that defeat in the referendum for an Indigenous voice to parliament – of which she was a staunch advocate – had contributed to putting a republic vote on ice.

Mr Peris said a republic referendum should not be held and would inevitably fail if there were a No campaign standing in the way of it.

She said Australia's most successful referendum occurred in 1967, "when there was no No campaign".

"We need a campaign where everyone says yes," she said.

Ms Peris said it was up to the leaders to come to a bipartisan agreement on a republic before it was put to a vote, saying "both people at the top need to be in agreeance with it".

When Australians last voted on becoming a republic, in 1999, then prime minister John Howard, strongly opposed replacing the late Queen Elizabeth II as head of state and the referendum was heavily defeated.

> 'I think we are a big enough country now to show up for independence and do what's right for future generations'
>
> NOVA PERIS
> FORMER LABOR SENATOR

Ms Peris added that past No campaigns, which were filled with "misinformation", are what have contributed to Australians' fears of holding a second referendum in such a short period, saying "people are scared of change". "Truth is important," she said.

"I think we are a big enough country now to show up for independence and do what's right for future generations."

Earlier this week, the Prime Minister told reporters a republic referendum was on hold for now, following the defeat of the voice to parliament last year.

"I committed to one referendum," he said. "We held it. It wasn't successful, and I think that was disappointing."

Ms Peris, the first Indigenous woman to sit in the Senate, said she would still advocate strongly for a republic, and said other Commonwealth nations showed a way forward on change.

"There's 15 countries that are still connected to the monarchy," Ms Peris told The Australian. "In the next couple of years, Australia's going to be dwindling down to the last five or six countries, because a lot of the Caribbean are saying, 'No, we want our independence'."

In 2021, Barbados became the first country to transition to a republic since Mauritius in 1992. Officials in at least six other Caribbean countries, including the Bahamas and Belize, have indicated their intent to leave the monarchy.

"I think Australia has been very respectful with our connectedness (to the Commonwealth)," Ms Peris said. "We don't lose it as part of our history, but at the end of the day I think we're big and bold enough now to become ... independent."

Assistant Minister for a Republic Matt Thistlethwaite has no timeline on when Labor will pursue a referendum on dumping the British monarch as Australia's head of state.

"I'm not going to put a timeline on it," he told the ABC last week. "At the moment, our priority is cost of living and that's the appropriate thing for the government to be concentrating on."

He said his portfolio was still needed as it was still Labor's ambition for the "longer term".

"I'm certainly committed to and still passionate about Australia, hopefully, having one day one of our own as our head of state, and I'll continue to perform that important work as an assistant to the Attorney-General," he said.

"We know that, unfortunately, the voice referendum wasn't successful, but we're not giving up. It's a longer-term priority."

Demands grow to bring them home

NCA NEWSWIRE / DIEGO FEDELE
Israeli supporters gather in Melbourne on Sunday

TESS McCRACKEN

More than 1000 Jewish Australians rallied in Melbourne on Sunday, calling for the release of Israeli hostages in Gaza a day after a Jewish community centre was targeted with vandalism.

Taking part in the global "Ride to Bring Them Home Now" campaign, hundreds of cyclists descended on Bayside's Beach Rd in the city's southeast on what marked 100 days since more than 200 Israeli citizens were taken hostage by Hamas on October 7.

Security and police watched as the community later gathered in Mallanbool Reserve in a show of solidarity, donning yellow ribbons, a symbol of readiness to welcome home hostages.

The event came as the Beth Weizmann Jewish Community Centre in Caulfield was targeted for the second time in two months on Saturday by pro-Palestine supporters who spray painted a Palestinian flag and the word "Genocide" on the centre's front facade.

Zionism Victoria and Beth Weizmann Jewish Community Centre executive director Zeddy Lawrence said "the only shadow" over the Ride To Bring Them Home Now event was the vandalism. "Once again though, we are left wondering if any action will be taken against those who commit such a brazen act of anti-Semitism or whether the perpetrators will get away with it once more," Mr Lawrence said.

Jewish Community Council of Victoria chief executive Naomi Levin said the act was an attempt to "intimidate and instil fear" among Jewish Australians.

"The Jewish community is being targeted for activities half a world away and the motivation for this can only be defined as anti-Semitic," Ms Levin said.

"Vandalising a known centre for the Jewish community in the heart of Melbourne has one objective: to intimidate and instil fear."

State opposition spokeswoman for Education Jess Wilson condemned the wave of anti-Semitic attacks occurring throughout Melbourne while speaking at the event, and said discrimination of any form will not be tolerated.

"We must also address a deeply concerning issue that has been on the rise in Melbourne, the resurgence of anti-Semitism, and let me be unequivocal, anti-Semitism has no place in our city, in our state or in our country," Ms Wilson said.

"I was absolutely disgusted ... to see the graffiti on the Beth Weizmann Community Centre, (on) a day of immense grief for the Jewish community, an absolutely disgusting and decisive attack against the Jewish community."

Calling for unity, federal Labor MP for Higgins Michelle Ananda-Rajah echoed the message a Palestinian man told her on her recent trip to Israel: "Palestinians and Jews can live together".

"We need a road out of this and that road is not going to be lined with ideology and hate; that road will be lined with education and economics," Ms Ananda-Rajah said. "That's the new dawn that we need to really demand from leaders because the status quo is failing everyone."

As the first day of the Australian Open kicked off on Sunday, Tennis Australia chief Craig Tiley warned protesters there was zero tolerance for any disruptions.

He said anyone who disrupts what should be an "enjoyable and safe experience" for tennis goers will be asked to leave and not welcomed back.

Couple rejects sperm donor for being Jewish

'We are down a rabbit hole with the depth of our emotions and the ethical challenges ... We don't have the capacity to navigate parts of your identity in this donor relationship so we are respectfully ending this now'
QUEENSLAND COUPLE TO POTENTIAL SPERM DONOR JAY LAZARUS

NICKI CONNOLLY/NCA NEWSWIRE
Perth hairdresser Jay Lazarus is devastated after a couple terminated plans for him to be their sperm donor, citing 'ethical challenges' over the Israel-Hamas war

RACHEL BAXENDALE

A Perth man has described his devastation after a couple with whom he had developed a close relationship terminated plans for him to be their sperm donor, citing "ethical challenges" amid the Israel-Hamas war and their inability to "navigate parts" of his "identity", namely his Jewishness.

Hair stylist Jay Lazarus says he began the process of becoming a sperm donor in October 2022, and "connected deeply" with a same-sex couple from Queensland, with whom he had been undergoing the sperm donation process, until they decided not to proceed in late 2023. In a text message Mr Lazarus has posted on his social media, the couple profess to be "about kindness and love", but proceed to say that they are "so deeply affected" by the "war between Israel and Gaza" that they feel out of their depth proceeding with the donor relationship.

"We are so deeply affected by the world events at the moment, particularly the war between Israel and Gaza," the couple say in their rejection text.

"We cannot even begin to imagine what you are going through with your heritage and deep beliefs. We are so sorry for everything that is happening.

"We are down a rabbit hole with the depth of our emotions and the ethical challenges, and truth be told we feel out of our depth in proceeding with this donor relationship.

"We are about kindness and love. Everything we do, say, work towards, is love in action, for every human being. We are sad for the Israeli's (sic) and we are sad for the Palestinian people, so deeply sad.

"We don't have the capacity to navigate parts of your identity in this donor relationship so we are respectfully ending this now."

Mr Lazarus said he had been "left reeling" by the text.

"In their words, they couldn't go through with the process due to 'ethical challenges' and their inability to navigate parts of my identity' – my Jewishness," Mr Lazarus said.

"Influenced by what they've been told about the conflict between Israel and Hamas, this couple preferred to go back to square one of the sperm donor process rather than accept my Jewish sperm.

"Prejudice is still pervasive, even in progressive circles that champion 'kindness and love' ... anti-Semitism is not just a relic of the past, but a living, breathing, prejudice that continues today.

"This couple has chosen a path, and while I can't change their view, I refuse to let it diminish my pride or lose hope. I'm proud to be gay, proud to be Jewish, and proud to stand against hate."

Executive Council of Australian Jewry co-CEO Alex Ryvchin said Mr Lazarus's experience was a "highly unusual incident which shows the sprawl of anti-Semitism in our society since October 7".

"For a man to be rejected as a sperm donor simply because he is of the same ethnicity as Israelis battling jihadism is outrageous," Mr Ryvchin said.

"The manner in which the donors tell themselves they act only out of love while succumbing to hatred is quite incredible.

"This would not occur with any other form of racism or discrimination. Yet where Jews are concerned it seems perfectly reasonable to reject someone because they are Jew and still claim the moral high ground. My thoughts are with the man affected and I commend him for his pride and strength in the face of this attack on him and his identity."

Australian Jewish Association CEO Robert Gregory said: "Whatever your thoughts on the Middle East conflict, this is an example of outright anti-Semitism and just a horrible way to treat someone who was acting out of kindness."

"It illustrates that much of the wave of progressive hostility toward Israel, is at its core, hostility toward Jews."

Wong won't see site of atrocities

Continued from Page 1

State Antony Blinken, who hasn't toured the sites. But Mr Blinken has just completed his fifth visit to Israel and the broader region since October 7, deployments that have centred on solidifying the US-Israeli partnership and high-stakes diplomacy to prevent a wider conflagration.

Canada and Japan's foreign ministers did not visit southern Israeli communities on their recent visits either.

In remarks released ahead of her departure, Senator Wong signalled that her mission wasn't one of solidarity with Israel and made several sharply disapproving statements of its role in the current conflict, saying the Jewish state "must respect international humanitarian law and conduct military operations lawfully".

"The way Israel defends itself matters," she said. "I will express our profound concern that there are increasingly few safe places for Gazans. I will reiterate our call for safe, unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access so that food, water, fuel, medicine and essential assistance (can) reach people in desperate need, and so civilians can get to safety."

But she also reiterated the Australian government's condemnation of Hamas, the need for the terrorist group to surrender and to immediately return all

> 'I will express our profound concern that there are increasingly few safe places for Gazans'
>
> PENNY WONG
> FOREIGN MINISTER

Israeli hostages – some 132 of them – still being held in Gaza.

"Australia has consistently and unequivocally condemned Hamas' October 7 terror attacks, the appalling loss of life, and the heinous acts of violence perpetrated in those attacks, including sexual violence. We continue to call for the immediate and unconditional release of hostages," she said. "One hundred days since the October 7 terror attacks, this visit is about advocating for a pathway out of this conflict."

Her visit to Israel comes at a time of wrinkles developing in relations with the Jewish state and as Australia begins distances itself from pro-Israeli positions adopted by the nation's AUKUS partners. Last month Australia broke with the UK and US to vote in favour of a humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza during an emergency session of the UN general assembly. The US was one of 10 countries to vote against that resolution; the UK abstained, as did Germany and Ukraine.

The UN vote is likely to be a focal point of discussion between Senator Wong and her Israeli counterpart, as will Australia's mysterious position on the case brought by South Africa against Israel at the International Court of Justice.

Those hearings began in The Hague last week, but unlike the UK or the US – both of which oppose South Africa's application – the Albanese government has yet to reveal its position.

Peris blasts pro-Palestinian use of Aboriginal flag

PAIGE TAYLOR
INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS CORRESPONDENT

The Aboriginal flag is being misappropriated by pro-Palestinians activists at rallies around Australia, according to Indigenous former senator Nova Peris, who led the campaign to ensure anyone can fly it for free.

Ms Peris's advocacy resulted in the Morrison government purchasing the copyright of artist Harold Thomas's flag design in 2022, meaning it can be used without fear of infringing copyright.

However, during a visit to the Sydney Jewish Museum on Sunday, Olympic gold medallist Ms Peris, a former senator for the Northern Territory, denounced use of the Aboriginal flag by pro-Palestinian activists.

Ms Peris joined Jewish MP Julian Leeser at the museum in Darlinghurst as Aboriginal flags were flown at a Friends of Palestine rally in the centre of Perth on Sunday. In November, Australia Palestine Advocacy Network president Nasser Mashni, on ABC's Q&A program, wore a pin that joined the Aboriginal and Palestinian flags.

NIKKI SHORT
Nova Peris with Julian Leeser at the Jewish Museum

"I am really saddened," Ms Peris told The Australian.

"I am really quite upset and disgusted also how the Aboriginal flag has been misappropriated.

"I led that campaign to free our flag ... that's our sacredness."

Ms Peris said the Jewish community in Australia had fought for Indigenous Australians for decades, including to overturn the myth of terra nullius and later in the unsuccessful campaign for constitutional recognition through an Indigenous voice.

Jewish barrister Ron Castan QC devoted a decade of his life to the Mabo case that gave Indigenous people rights in law, she said.

Mr Leeser moved from Peter Dutton's shadow cabinet to the Liberal Party backbench rather than support the No case in the voice referendum, she said. "It was the Jewish lawyers who stood with us. Julian lost his shadow ministry because he wanted to be on the right side of history.

"(And) terra nullius does no longer exist because of the Jewish lawyers that fought for our identity. So everyone who is getting around now on your social medias, you've got it wrong."

Ms Peris said the Jewish community understood what it meant to be connected to country even if they did not live on it.

"We had to explain to them our connectedness to country and they fought for our recognition," she said. "So for any Indigenous person to deny the Jewish connectedness, you need to understand history. Go and learn it."

Mr Leeser said the relationship between the Jewish community and Indigenous Australians went back to at least 1938, when Aboriginal man William Cooper led a March to the German consulate in Melbourne.

Less than a month after Kristallnacht, when Jewish people were targeted in widespread rioting and looting across Germany, Cooper's stand against "the cruel persecution of the Jewish people by the Nazi government in Germany" was unique.

Amid fears Invasion Day rallies on January 26 could become a platform for anti-Jewish sentiment, Mr Leeser said: "I just don't think it's what Australia Day is all about. Australia Day is a day for us to reflect on where we've come from and where we're going as a country. It shouldn't be taken over or hijacked by some other group with another agenda."

Mr Leeser said Jewish leaders had seen the importance of standing with their Indigenous brothers and sisters as fundamental to their own contribution to Australia.

"I just want to praise Nova, Marcia Langton, Warren Mundine and others who have stood with our community in this time of a rise in anti-Semitism," he said.

"I think our communities understand what it is to be a racial minority in this country ... we also understand the importance of connection to land, whether it is connection to land in this country or as it is in our community, connection to land in Israel."

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Ultimate fairytale ending with

Clockwise from main: Frederik and Mary arrive at Amalienborg Palace; the king and queen kiss on the balcony of Christiansborg Palace; waving to the crowds; and Queen Margrethe II departs after abdicating

GETTY IMAGES, REUTERS, AFP

MARY IN HER WORDS

"My biggest memory is of Diana walking up the red carpet with a very, very long train. But I don't recall wishing that one day I would be a princess. I wanted to be a veterinarian"

"I didn't know he was the Prince of Denmark. Half an hour later someone came up to me and said, "Do you know who these people are?""

"Of course we have Queen Elizabeth as head of state, but in many ways we are a kind of republic. We don't have royals in Australia, so it was kind of unusual to run into those kind of people. But aside from that it was quite ordinary"

"Frederik is one of those people who being around makes you happy. He's intelligent and kind, and he's quite funny as well. We have a connection of the mind"

"Today is the first day of my new role. It is something that will evolve over time and I have much to learn and experience"

"Very early on, it was clear that there were expectations about what you wore and how you dressed. That was pretty daunting for me. I was a T-shirt-and-shorts girl, known to go barefoot"

"I can only admire Queen Elizabeth and my own mother-in-law, the Queen of Denmark, for their lifelong commitment and dedication to serving their country and their people"

"A monarchy exists in the time and the society that it is a part of, and Danes are progressive and innovative and free-thinking"

"To be happy is, I guess, the most important thing in life"

"I fundamentally believe that we all have the right to be who we are regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation. Denmark is a strong voice on this issue, and I wanted to lend my voice to the cause"

"The Danes are proud of the fact that their royal family can go around freely in society. Because of that, there is a natural respect of your space. If I go into Copenhagen, or out to eat, or to the cinema with my children, I feel like we are given the space to do so"

Mary, the queen who was made in Australia

JACQUELIN MAGNAY
CHRISTIANSBORG PALACE, COPENHAGEN

The roar of the crowd boomed around the open square outside of Christiansborg Palace and swept down the streets of Copenhagen as the new King and Queen of Denmark, Frederik X and Mary, emerged onto the parliamentary balcony early on Monday.

Here was the new royal couple, the first Australian-born queen, beaming and beautiful: offering a perfect wave, embraced by her husband and soon joined by her son, 18-year-old Christian, now the heir and new crown prince, and the rest of the family.

The emotional moment for the new king and queen was sealed with a kiss in front of the enthusiastic crowd. Frederik clutched his hand to his chest at times to show his gratitude for the show of support from the Danish people. Mary held Frederick's back, and then his hand tightly, as he fought back tears.

The Danish fairytale author Hans Christian Andersen couldn't have scripted it better. Well, perhaps if it had snowed just a touch in the chilly wintry afternoon.

Her Majesty Queen Mary, as she is now known, looked ethereal in a simple, white, form-fitting dress with a jewelled belt.

About 45 minutes earlier Queen Margrethe II had signed the documents officially declaring her abdication after 52 years on the throne, witnessed by the Danish cabinet, the new king and the crown prince.

Margrethe then left in a car, while the royal couple enjoyed a toast with a small gathering of witnesses, including one of Mary's sisters, Jane, and Frederik's younger brother Prince Joachim.

Joachim's wife Princess Marie stayed in Washington DC; family divisions linger after Margrethe's decision in 2022 to concentrate on the core hereditary line and strip Joachim and Marie's children of prince and princess titles. But what's a little family disagreement among royals?

When the king came on to the balcony, the prime minister, Mette Frederiksen, a Social Democrat who has become a fierce royalist, proclaimed the new King Frederik to the world and to the gathered throng below.

Frederik, 55, and his wife of 20 years, Mary, had arrived at the palace from their centuries-old residence at Amalienborg Palace in a state car. They left in the 19th century royal carriage made of black mahogany, decorated in red silk velvet with gold embroidery and tassels. The carriage was pulled by a magnificent team of grey horses.

An estimated 100,000 Danes came out into the freezing weather to see the new king and queen. The balcony kiss, urged by the crowd, initiated by Frederik and catching Mary a little unprepared, made the appearance all the more special, and perhaps marked a line through the couple's personal upheaval of late.

The carriage ride was a rare expression of pomp in the brief event that marked the transfer of royal power in Denmark. Despite the low-key ceremony, there was still ancient symbolism. At Amalienborg, the royal flag was taken down from Queen Margrethe's residence and erected outside the new king and queen's residence, the palace known as Frederik VIII's, in the same hexagonal forecourt.

The Danes, with one of the oldest monarchal lines in the world – the Glücksborg line reaches back to Gorm the Old and Queen Thyra in the mid 900s – have alternated between naming royal heirs either Frederik or Christian for the past 510 years.

King Christian X, Frederik X's great-grandfather, was monarch during the two world wars and was close to the public during the Nazi occupation of Denmark, riding his horse each day through Copenhagen's streets in a show of defiance.

If there was any doubt about whether Danish reverence for its monarchy remained intact, the joy and excitement of families, young people and the elderly lining the route on Monday aligned with decades of polls showing support for the Danish royal family exceeding 85 per cent.

Continued from Page 1

Frederik, 55, then pressed his hands to his heart before the royal family returned to the warmth of the palace.

At the time the proclamation was made, Queen Margrethe, 83, was thought to have returned to her home, her 52-year reign complete, to watch the spectacle on TV.

But the crowds remained, a sea of Danish flags waving in the mid-winter light, and a smattering of Australian ones too.

"It's just exciting that an ordinary person like us becomes a queen. It's very exciting," said Judy Langtree, a retiree waiting outside Christiansborg who flew with her granddaughter from Brisbane.

King Frederik later announced his mission statement, or motto: "Connected, committed for the Kingdom of Denmark." Margrethe's was "God's help, the people's love, Denmark's strength". Frederik's orchestra-conducting grandfather King Frederik's was "With God for Denmark".

Mary and Frederik then took a carriage ride to their home – Amalienborg Palace.

No foreign dignitaries or royals were invited, but among the first to congratulate Frederik and Mary was King Charles III, who wrote: "My wife joins me in writing to convey our very best wishes on the day of your accession to the throne of the Kingdom of Denmark.

"I pay tribute to the many years of service of your mother, Her Majesty Queen Margrethe II.

"I was delighted that Your Majesties were able to attend our coronation last year and I much look forward to future opportunities to celebrate the close connection that unites our countries and our families."

It was feared sub-zero temperatures might deter the crowds but it was not to be, with Danes who have embraced Mary, 51, as one of their own since her fairytale wedding to Frederik 20 years ago determined to be there.

They travelled through heavy snow in Jutland, packing out the ferries to Zealand to support the royals in this flourishing city built on the back of Viking raids and herring fishing.

HASSE NIELSEN, CAMERON RICHARDSON

Mary in an official portrait released last year, and the couple in Sydney in 2013

Among the crowd was a small group of activists protesting about an agreement to host US military bases in the country. They carried signs calling on "Pingo" – the nickname of the King from his time in the naval special forces when he was said to have resembled a penguin in his wetsuit – not to give royal assent.

But nearly everyone else was there to send their best wishes to the couple. The police presence was subtle and the mood was celebratory.

Frederik and Mary's love story, which began inauspiciously, eating pizza at the Slip Inn at Darling Harbour during the Sydney Olympics, has culminated in the Tasmanian now becoming Queen of Denmark, a nation of more than 5.8 million.

It has been a stellar leap from her days in Bondi Junction working for a Sydney real estate firm to the Danish royal palaces of Amalienborg, Fredensborg, Marselisborg, Grasten, Sorgenfri, a hunting lodge and even a French chateau winery Chateau de Cayx.

As she stepped out onto the balcony in the early hours of Monday she may have reflected on the dramatic upheaval of her life in nearly a quarter of a century.

At the turn of the century, she was a young woman keenly feeling the sudden loss of her mother Henrietta, known as Etta, who died from complications after heart surgery. Mary was establishing herself in the anonymity and brashness of Sydney when she fell in love with a dashing "turbo" prince. The romance involved clandestine meetings, a shift to France and then Denmark to learn the Danish language, and then blossomed under the warm embrace of the Danish people.

> 'My hope is to become a unifying king of Denmark. It is a task I have approached all my life. It is a task I take on with pride and joy'
>
> KING FREDERIK

Mary has had two decades of forging a distinct path within Danish society: earning the respect of all by helping Frederik be more confident in public, while she too has kept her poise despite being the centre of constant attention. She told Vogue after her wedding: "I knew I could deal with this because I was in it for all the right reasons. I am with the person that I love."

Mary's regal and dutiful air in representing the Danish people and "being exemplary" as one local confided, as well as helping women and the vulnerable through her charity, the Mary Foundation, have seen her popularity rise to enviable levels.

"She hasn't put one foot wrong in 20 years, that is quite something," said Copenhagen local Sanne Olson, 33. "When I was a teenager I tried to dress like her because she looked so smart and beautiful, and I will tell you a little secret, I still do."

Even the six-year, almost $50m renovation of their main Amalienborg Palace, the rococo building of Frederik VIII, was viewed uncritically as they restored an ancient decaying Empire interior and boosted the arts scene by allowing 10 modern Danish artists to paint murals in various rooms.

And of course, as well as being scandal-free, she is the mother to four unfailingly polite children, the new crown prince, 18-year-old Christian, 16-year-old Isabella, and 13-year-old twins Vincent and Josephine.

Keeping her children grounded has been a strong focus for Mary, with no mobile phones at the breakfast table and aides at a distance.

Mary often used a cargo bike with the children in front to do the school drop-off, and can be seen walking in the local streets. The square outside home is always open to the public.

The children have all attended public schools, in sharp contrast to the elite palace schooling of Frederik.

Mary has spoken about trying to use her platform to advocate for the empowerment of women and human rights for gay and trans-gender identities.

She pinpointed bullying and mental health as areas of priority. It was a theme she thought hard about in the early days of her marriage, wanting to make a difference and not just cut ceremonial ribbons.

While she concentrates on causes to improve health, Frederik has been passionate about pushing Denmark's eco-credentials on trade trips. As Queen, Mary will no longer have to curtsy to foreign royals – she was pictured executing a deep dip for newly crowned Queen Camilla last year – and will have the entire collection of crown jewels from which to accessorise her smart outfits.

Royal analysts tipped that Frederik, whose common touch and love of sport has resonated with many, along with his wise choice of an intelligent, modern Australian as his wife, would choose a modern slogan.

The couple's stipend of $416,000 a month from the Danish government will increase substantially.

On the eve of the coronation the Danish government approved an increase in civil list monies so that "the royal house can continue and develop its activities, which are linked to, among other things, travel and representative tasks, business promotion and voluntary work both in Denmark and abroad".

The government also confirmed the King and Queen's rights to the royal yacht, the right to hunt in state forests and also the government's commitment to help with the expensive upkeep of the royal residences.

THE FRONT
DAILY PODCAST
WHEREVER YOU GET YOUR PODCASTS

hearts of a nation conquered

AFP, GETTY IMAGES

From left, Princess Isabella, Prince Christian, King Frederik, Queen Mary, Princess Josephine and Prince Vincent on the balcony of Christiansborg Palace in Copenhagen; below from left, Queen Margrethe II arrives at Christiansborg Palace; Frederik and Mary greet the crowds; a well-wisher shows her love for Mary; and Princess Josephine, 13, enjoys the moment

Accession to the throne is simplicity itself

JACQUELIN MAGNAY
ANALYSIS

King Frederik X and Queen Mary's smooth accession to the Danish throne has been all the more powerful for its simplicity.

Frederik has had a lifetime, and Mary has had 20 years, to prepare for this momentous occasion, yet Queen Margrethe's abdication was a shock and they had just a little over two weeks' notice.

The outpouring of Danish love for their royal family, and a Danish capital filled wall-to-wall with wellwishers, cleared the path for their majesties to take over Denmark's constitutional monarchy with no obvious dissent.

The act itself occurred with a single signature on a piece of paper, a proclamation to the people and a picturesque carriage ride through the cobbled streets.

Yet this seemingly effortless and well-ordered crowning moment has come at a time of turmoil within the walls of their Amalienborg Palace home.

Frederik's ill-timed and ill-considered assignation in October with a Mexican socialite in Spain, splashed not only across Danish tabloids, but also in more sombre media outlets, has caused much heartache. The Danish royal family has not commented on the matter and the woman involved, Genoveve Casanova, has denied that any impropriety took place.

On Saturday the Danish tabloid Ekstra Bladet ran a full-page invitation to Ms Casanova inviting her to the changing of the throne, noting that Frederik may not have invited her, or offered her suitable accommodation for the weekend, but cheekily insisting that they would pick up the tab.

Mary, of course, has maintained her dignity throughout the saga and her big concern has been about the impact of such headlines and public discourse on her four children.

Their son Christian, 18, and now the Crown Prince, is old enough to deal with the matter, but Isabella, 16, and the twins, Vincent and Josephine, who celebrated their 13th birthdays last week, have been teased about their father at school. Unlike most Danish families, what goes on behind closed royal doors is magnified to the masses.

"This affects more than the marriage, there is a whole family who has been thrown by Frederik's decision to go to Spain," said royal commentator Trine Larsen.

"The young princesses and prince have been teased at school, and that is something Mary has been very strict about, the issue of bullying, and so it will have been very hurtful for her to have to confront."

The Danes have a refrain, "All Hail King Mary", in an acknowledgment that it is Mary, 51, who is the sensible one in the marriage, and is the dutiful monarch while her husband, at 55, is having to be reminded of his royal and marital responsibilities. No one has any doubt that Mary will be up for the task of being Queen. But as for Frederik, is he ready to be King?

There are jokes doing the rounds that now the royal couple have control of more than half a dozen castles, a train carriage and a yacht there are plenty of "doghouses" for Frederik to be sent to.

"Will Frederik as King shake off this man-child image?" asks another royal analyst, Kim Bach.

Ms Larsen notes: "As a Prince he had a penchant for beautiful women before he met Mary, and now as King, he has to step up."

If only this moment of succession can be the template for this love story of a commoner meeting a prince, to have the happiest of fairytale endings.

At 18, heir to Danish throne the first truly digital royal

JENNA CLARKE
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Prince Christian not only carries a new title of Crown Prince but is also, at 18, Europe's first "digital native" heir.

The eldest son of King Frederik X and Her Majesty Queen Mary of Denmark has officially commenced his apprenticeship as a future king with the abdication of his beloved "far mor" (father's mother), Queen Margrethe.

Last year, following his 18th birthday, it was announced Christian would refuse a publicly funded salary in order to pursue his university studies. That all changed on Sunday night when he attained a seat in the Council of State next to his father. If Frederik is unfit to govern, Christian will be appointed regent.

Like all royals, Christian's entire life has been in the spotlight. At five days old he made his debut in the arms of his mother; at eight he was involved in official duties; now, at 18 he will start learning the ropes to one day ascend the throne of one of the world's oldest, and most revered, monarchies.

The core difference to his probation period to his father's, despite the fact Frederik assumed the title of Crown Prince at just three years old, is that Christian has come of age and will reign in the era of social and modern media.

AFP

Frederik and Mary flank Prince Christian in 2021

It's a lot harder for a prince to separate public from private when everyone is a citizen journalist and camera operator.

"His whole life as he knows it is played out on Instagram. If Mary were a typical Australian mum she would have probably started an account for him but she's not a typical mum and he's not a typical child, but he is really one of the first royals where social media has followed his life even since before he was born," social media expert Meg Coffey said.

"He's 18, the time when you're finding yourself, as well as partying. But in order for the future of the monarchy to survive they have to show he is relevant, relatable and approachable. The way to do that is via social media.

It's going to be harder still to be an 18-year-old living, learning and starting to understand the world and his place in it.

"Just look at how Prince William has diverted from King Charles, his social media is a lot more relaxed and personal, they are reading the room really well. Christian too should look to them and also someone like Robert Irwin, who's online persona is brilliantly executed."

Christian's debut sparked mass coverage and millions of hashtags and viral videos last year, and "#princechristian" now has close to 200 million followers on TikTok alone.

In October, Margrethe hosted a white-tie gala at Christiansborg Palace, where, among his school friends and other young royals, representatives from a selection of Denmark's youth organisations as well as young people who have distinguished themselves in the world of sport, art and culture were invited.

Frederik made mention of his son's affection for the digital world. "Before you always looked in our direction when there was a question you couldn't find an answer to. Today, you also look elsewhere – for example – down at your phone," Frederik said.

After a gentle ribbing the young prince made his first official public comments, as his beaming parents looked on with tears in their eyes. "Thank you, Mum and Dad, for supporting me ... all the way ... I take pride in having to serve my country. So even though I have shaking hands a little today, I have in my heart a meeting with the future."

Christian now, with his parents, has the ability to shape Denmark's culture, economy and development, while it is an enormous ask for a someone just out of high school, experts suggest he should lean into social media and start making his own digital footprint.

"He should walk in smiling to his new role and, of course, be on social media," Starmaker's Teresa Page – Mary's deportment coach – told The Australian. "The Danish monarchy is very impressive due to their personable style. If you go to the palaces there's no gates, there's no guards. They are very accessible to the Danish public. It is one of the ways that they uplift the whole country, Prince Christian understands that and that will not only influence his role in reality, but online as well."

Even Tassie devils go wild over royals

CHRIS KIDD

Celebrating one of their own at Sandy Bay, Tasmania

JENNA CLARKE

The accession of Hobart-born Queen Mary of Denmark is not only ensuring the future of one of Europe's oldest monarchies, it'll also help save Australian wildlife.

The devil works hard but the Tasmanian version works harder just to survive, which is why in lieu of a gift to the new king and queen, Anthony Albanese has pledged $10,000 in Mary's honour to Wildcare Tasmania to support its efforts to further conserve the iconic marsupial.

"Crown Princess Mary grew up in Tasmania, and so it is fitting Australia marks this occasion with a gift to support the conservation of the Tasmanian devil," the Prime Minister said at the weekend following the announcement of the federal government's donation.

"The story of Crown Prince Frederik and Crown Princess Mary of Denmark is one Australians have followed closely and hold dear to their hearts.

"Australia and Denmark's close ties go beyond this union, with our nations sharing a commitment to democratic values, human rights, action on climate change and liberal trade.

"On behalf of all Australians, I wish Crown Prince Frederik and Crown Princess Mary of Denmark the very best."

As well as lighting up the Tasman Bridge in red, Tasmanian Premier Jeremy Rockcliff said his government had also organised a new "handmade Huon pine occasional table" for Mary and Frederik to adorn one of their four palaces that make up Denmark's Amalienborg Palace complex.

Closer to Mary's home town the parties on Sunday were only just getting started.

Denmark House in Melbourne hosted the public to mark the succession of the throne.

Honorary consul general Jan Ravnholdt welcomed expats, Scandi enthusiasts, royal watchers and "all Danes and Tasmanians" in Melbourne to celebrate "this historic day".

Amid the sea of red and white outfits, Mr Ravnholdt encouraged guests to sign an official book of congratulations for the royal couple. The book will also be available online and at the Danish embassy in Canberra from Monday.

As the Sydney drizzle added an element of "hygge" to the public events on Sunday, there were a number of gatherings that popped up around Mary's former address, including a picnic organised by the Danish Club of Australia that was bursting with cosiness, national pride and plates of rundstykker – Denmark's famous morning rolls – stuffed with Danish meatballs and sausage sizzles and topped with "Aussie farmer tomato sauce".

MARY ELIZABETH DONALDSON

Born at Queen Alexandra Hospital in Battery Point, Hobart, on February 5, 1972, the youngest of four children to Henrietta and John Dalgleish Donaldson.

1974: She began schooling at Clear Lake City Elementary School in Houston, Texas, when her father, a professor of applied mathematics, worked at the Johnson Space Centre.

1975: Family returns to Sandy Bay, Tasmania.

1978–1983: Waimea Heights Primary School.

1984–1987: Taroona High School. She is named captain of the girls' hockey and swimming teams.

1988–1989: Hobart College.

MAY 27, 1995: Graduates from the University of Tasmania with a bachelor's degree in commerce and law.

1995: Moves to Melbourne to work as a marketing trainee at DDB Needham.

1996: Becomes account manager with Mojo Partners.

1997: Her mother dies from complications following heart surgery.

1999: Starts work as an account director with advertising agency Young & Rubicam.

2000: Becomes sales director at Belle Property. Meets Crown Prince Frederik of Denmark at the Slip Inn in Sydney during the Olympic Games.

2001: Her father marries British author Susan Moody.

2001: Mary named as Frederik's girlfriend by the Danish press. Moves to Denmark in December.

2003: They become engaged on October 8.

2004: Married on May 14 at Copenhagen Cathedral.

2005: Prince Christian Valdemar Henri John born.

2007: Princess Isabella Henrietta Ingrid Margrethe born.

2011: Prince Vincent Frederik Minik Alexander and Princess Josephine Sophia Ivalo Mathilda born.

2023: On December 31, Queen Margrethe II announces her abdication.

US, UK WARN DEFIANT HOUTHIS

Red Sea conflict poised to escalate

HARRY YORKE
TIM SHIPMAN
DIPESH GADHER
LONDON

Britain and the US have warned they will attack Houthi targets again if the Iranian-backed militants keep disrupting commercial and military ships in the Red Sea.

The US has delivered a private message to Iran about the militants it backs in Yemen.

Foreign Secretary David Cameron said Britain would "always defend the freedom of navigation" and was ready to "back words with actions".

It came after a second night of American strikes against the rebels who have been attacking vessels in the Red Sea.

Lord Cameron said Britain had issued "warning after warning", including to Iran, before taking action.

"We have sent an unambiguous message: what the Houthis are doing is wrong, and we are determined to put a stop to it. We will work with allies. We will always defend the freedom of navigation. And, crucially, we will be prepared to back words with actions," he wrote in The Sunday Telegraph.

> 'What the Houthis are doing is wrong, and we are determined to put a stop to it'
>
> DAVID CAMERON
> BRITISH FOREIGN SECRETARY

President Joe Biden, speaking to reporters at the White House before he left for Camp David, said "we delivered (the message) privately and we're confident that we're well-prepared".

He had said on Friday he had "already delivered a message to Iran" and added that "they know not to do anything".

Mr Biden, whose administration removed the Houthis from a State Department list of "foreign terrorist organisations" in 2021, was asked by reporters whether he felt the term "terrorist" described the movement now. "I think they are," he said.

But the Iran-backed rebels have threatened a "strong and effective response" to the US strikes on a radar site on Friday night, which came a day after dozens of American and British strikes on Houthi facilities in Yemen.

Following the first round of strikes, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said the UK and US had acted "in self-defence" and would not hesitate to ensure the safety of commercial shipping.

British Defence Secretary Grant Shapps told London's Daily Telegraph that the world is "running out of patience" with Iran. Lord Cameron said the US-UK operation went "some way to degrade Houthi capabilities built up with Iranian backing".

The Houthis have claimed "all American-British interests have become legitimate targets for the Yemeni armed forces", and a group of protesters was seen burning UK flags outside the British embassy in Tehran on Friday.

British embassies have been put on high alert in the Middle East, amid fears of an escalation of the wider conflict in the region. A senior UK source said that in recent weeks they had been moved to a state of high readiness as the prospect of direct military action increased.

"All the embassies in the region are on an appropriately high alert," the source said. A second source said embassies had been moved to "high readiness" with "low footprints".

They said Britain had also stepped up security protocols more widely, with particular focus on assets across the Middle East. It is understood that in the days leading up to the strikes the US military and political establishment was sensitive to the fact Britain could bear the brunt of any retaliation in Iran.

"They were really conscious of the risk to our people in Iran," a diplomatic source said.

The same concerns were discussed by British ministers in the National Security Council, where intelligence chiefs predicted the Houthis would claim the attacks were tied to Israel's war with Hamas.

But a senior government source sought to downplay the risk to British diplomats: "We're confident that we can secure all of our interests."

The Foreign Office has updated its travel advice for a number of countries in the region – including the UAE, Egypt, Jordan, Qatar and Oman – to warn that, while military activity is limited to the Red Sea and Yemen, "there is a possibility that travel advice for nearby countries could change at short notice". It also urges travellers in the region to monitor further updates.

At a pro-Palestinian march in central London attended by an estimated 100,000 people, a number of placards referenced the UK and US military strikes in Yemen. One group of protesters appeared to be chanting in support of Houthi rebels, shouting: "Yemen, Yemen make us proud, turn another ship around." Lord Cameron rejected suggestions the Houthi disruption was "all about Israel and Gaza".

Mr Sunak is expected to update MPs on the legal basis and justification of strikes when parliament returns on Monday, with Mr Shapps also likely to provide a more detailed statement on military action.

THE SUNDAY TIMES

Thousands rally in Israel for end to hostages' 100-day ordeal

GETTY IMAGES

People hold photos of hostages during a rally in Tel Aviv, above, to mark 100 days of captivity; a woman walks through a tunnel created by Israeli artist Roni Levavi to simulate a Hamas tunnel, below

MARGAUX BERGEY
TEL AVIV

Thousands of Israelis rallied in Tel Aviv on Saturday night calling for the release of hostages being held in Gaza by Hamas militants, on the eve of the 100th day of their captivity.

The protests came after families unveiled a replica of the tunnels in the besieged Palestinian territory where their loved ones are believed to have been held since their abduction on October 7.

The crowds carried a massive banner that read: "And the world remains silent", and chanted that the hostages must be released "Now, now, now".

"We will continue to come here week after week until everybody is released," Edan Begerano, 47, said. "Everywhere I look, I feel impressed by Israeli people who came massively today to support and to be with us."

French President Emmanuel Macron sent a video message to the demonstrators calling for negotiations for hostage releases to resume. "France does not abandon its children," he said, listing the names of some of the French dual nationals being held.

About 100 hostages were released during a week-long truce in November, the Israelis among them in exchange for Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails.

Separately about 100 people gathered to call for an end to the war, brandishing signs saying: "Revenge is not victory" and "No to the occupation".

Saturday night protests have become a weekly event in Tel Aviv since the war began, but groups supporting the hostage families were out in greater numbers to mark the 100th day of the war. Palestinian militants took about 250 captives on October 7, 132 of whom Israel says remain in Gaza, including at least 25 believed to have been killed. The attack by Hamas also resulted in about 1140 deaths in Israel.

The mock-up of a Hamas tunnel was installed outside Tel Aviv Museum of Art, with a dimly lit passage, dirt on the ground and the sounds of gunfire and shelling playing constantly.

Israeli artist Roni Levavi, who designed the installation, said he wanted to create "the most faithful reconstruction" of the Gaza tunnels and relied on images from the media. This would "give an idea of what the hostages have been feeling for so many days", Levavi said.

Inbar Goldstein, who had several relatives released during the November truce and several others killed in the initial attack, said: "That's the only tunnel in this story that has a light in the end of it." After walking through the mock tunnel, Eyal Moar said it was only a small part of the ordeal experienced by his uncle, Abraham Munder, 79, and the other hostages. "We know the conditions are really horrifying – no fresh air, very little food, no meds, no sunlight, they sleep on the floor," Mr Moar said in the central plaza renamed "Hostages Square" by campaigners.

On Friday, Israeli officials said they had reached a deal to get medicines to the remaining captives – which some of the families believed was scant progress.

"It's not enough," said Ella Ben Ami, whose father, Ohad Ben Ami, 55, is among those still held.

"I want him home, in hospital, in good healthcare, not in Hamas healthcare."

Israel has pounded Gaza since October 7, killing at least 23,843 people, mostly women and children, according to the Hamas-run territory's health ministry.

The Israeli military often speaks of "terror tunnels" it says Hamas fighters use to move hostages around, as well as to store weapons and shelter from the bombing. The relatives said the experience of being stuck, even in the mocked-up tunnel, was harrowing. "I was there for five minutes and I just wanted to run away," said Ms Ben Ami. "I had a choice to run away but they don't."

AFP

COMMENTARY P11

Hamas terror cells plotting attacks on European targets

Israel intelligence agencies Mossad and Shin Bet have reportedly uncovered a Hamas terror plot to attack Israel's embassy in Sweden and other Jewish targets throughout Europe.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said the network, led by Hamas commanders in Lebanon, had also been planning to buy drones and use European criminal organisations to support attacks on European soil.

In a statement, Mr Netanyahu's office said Israel had discovered "details on theatres of operation, terror targets and on those involved in carrying out attacks – from Hamas commanders in Lebanon to the last of the attackers in the operational infrastructure", the Times of Israel reports.

The plot, reportedly led by Hamas commanders recently killed in Lebanon in airstrikes attributed to Israel, is the latest uncovered by European authorities in the past month.

Members of Hamas cells in Denmark, Germany and The Netherlands were arrested in December on suspicion of plotting to attack Jewish targets in Europe.

On Friday, Danish police said seven people suspected of involvement in a planned terror attack foiled by authorities in December had links to Hamas.

Danish prosecutor Anders Larsson confirmed the case "has links to Hamas", Danish police said.

Police said on December 14 they had arrested three people in Denmark suspected of planning a "terror" attack, but provided no other details.

Kerry stepping down to help Biden step up

ANNIE LINSKEY
ANDREW RESTUCCIA
WASHINGTON

Kerry

John Kerry is stepping down as the US President's special envoy for climate this northern spring to help Joe Biden's re-election bid.

The change comes weeks after Mr Kerry, 80, played a key role during a climate conference in Dubai helping to forge a compromise among nearly 200 countries aimed at reducing fossil fuels.

The White House didn't immediately comment on Mr Kerry's decision.

Mr Kerry, whose departure will come as Mr Biden intensifies his re-election campaign, is one of the few top officials to depart an administration that has had historically low turnover. He intends to help Mr Biden's campaign by publicising the President's work in combating global warming, according to multiple US media outlets citing officials familiar with the situation.

He informed Mr Biden of his intentions to leave on Wednesday (Thursday AEST), and his staff learned of the decision on Saturday, those officials said.

Mr Kerry has held the post for three years and has close ties with top Chinese officials, with whom he has been eager to engage even as some of the President's advisers strike a more hawkish posture toward Beijing.

Over the northern summer, as tensions between the two countries were high, Mr Kerry travelled to China to iron out differences between Washington and Beijing on climate matters and was also able to push forward the two powers' tentative efforts to reset fraught ties.

"We came here to unstick what had been stuck," Mr Kerry told reporters after hours of meetings with Chinese officials over the summer. "And, indeed, we did succeed."

In a rare display of unity, the US and China helped carry the COP28 December climate summit in Dubai, where negotiators sealed a historic although watered-down agreement to begin to transition away from oil, gas and coal.

Mr Kerry had welcomed Chinese counterpart Xie Zhenhua a month earlier in California, where the two countries agreed on outlines of climate action that partly served as a basis for the nearly 200-nation Dubai deal.

News of Mr Kerry's stepping down comes one day after Mr Xie retired on health grounds.

Mr Biden has largely stocked his cabinet and the White House with officials who have longtime experience as aides rather than with big-name Democrats. Mr Kerry, the Democratic nominee for president in 2004 and a Massachusetts senator, is a notable exception. In tapping Mr Kerry, who was also secretary of state during the Obama administration, Mr Biden opted for an envoy with gravitas who could repair international relations on climate that had frayed during the Trump administration.

Mr Kerry, as secretary of state, had overseen US negotiations on the Paris climate accord. In 2017, Donald Trump pulled out of that agreement, but the US rejoined it soon after Mr Biden took office.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Doomed American lunar lander heads back to Earth

ISSAM AHMED
WASHINGTON

A private US lunar lander that has been leaking fuel throughout its journey is now headed for Earth and is likely to burn up in the atmosphere, the company said on Sunday.

Astrobotic has been posting regular updates on the Peregrine lander's status since the start of its ill-fated voyage, which began when it blasted off last Monday on a new Vulcan rocket built by United Launch Alliance.

Shortly after it separated from the rocket, the spaceship experienced an on-board explosion and it soon became clear it would not make a soft lunar touchdown because of the amount of the propellant it was losing – though Astrobotic's team was able to power up science experiments it was carrying for NASA and other space agencies, and gather spaceflight data.

"Our latest assessment now shows the spacecraft is on a path towards Earth, where it will likely burn up in the Earth's atmosphere," the Pittsburgh company posted on X. "The team is currently assessing options and we will update as soon as we are able."

The box-shaped robot has now been in space for more than six days and was on Sunday 390,000km from our planet, Astrobotic added.

Space watchers have been following Peregrine's trajectory closely and many had hoped it might still make a "hard landing" on the moon, as other failed landers have done before, though it's now clear that even that reduced goal won't be achieved.

As well as science hardware, the spaceship is carrying cargo for private clients of Astrobotic, including a sports drink can, a physical Bitcoin as well as human and animal ashes and DNA.

Astrobotic is the latest private entity to have failed in a soft landing, following an Israeli non-profit and a Japanese company.

NASA had paid Astrobotic more than $US100m for carrying its cargo under an experimental program called Commercial Lunar Payload Services. The overall goal is to seed a commercial lunar economy and reduce its own overheads. Though it hasn't worked this time, NASA officials have made clear their strategy of "more shots on goal" means more chances to score, and the next attempt, by the Houston-based Intuitive Machines, is due next month. Astrobotic will get another chance in November when its Griffin lander transports NASA's VIPER rover to the lunar south pole.

AFP

AUSTRALIAN PREMIERE / AUSTRALIAN EXCLUSIVE
The Threepenny Opera
BERLINER ENSEMBLE / DIRECTED BY BARRIE KOSKY
6 – 10 Mar / Her Majesty's Theatre
AKRAM KHAN'S
Jungle Book reimagined
15 – 16 Mar / Festival Theatre
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Stakes high as West braces for Xi reaction

Canberra calls for calm after 'troublemaker' wins

GETTY IMAGES

William Lai and running-mate Hsiao Bi-khim savour victory at party headquarters in Taipei on Saturday night

WILL GLASGOW
ANALYSIS

The Taiwanese presidential election is more than just a slap in the face for Beijing – although it is that too.

The Communist Party's best efforts to keep William Lai out of Taiwan's presidential office failed. However, the result also creates new opportunities for Xi Jinping.

As expected, the incoming President's Democratic Progressive Party has lost control of the Legislative Yuan, Taiwan's parliament. Passing legislation in the coming four-year term won't be easy.

Each vote will require the DPP getting the support of either the Kuomintang or the new upstart party, Ko Wen-je's Taiwan People's Party, whose youthful support base made it the other big winner on Saturday.

In his victory speech, Lai said he would work to bring a new style of "communication, consultation, participation and co-operation" to Taiwan's parliament. That would be quite a change from its famously combative politics.

Diplomats in Taipei have told The Australian they expect Beijing will do everything it can to inflame partisan differences, obstruct Lai's agenda and try to undermine the Taiwanese people's faith in their democratic system.

"They will try to make chaos," one Western diplomat said.

So far, Beijing is failing at that too. Despite all the existential rhetoric on the campaign trail, the weekend's vote was notable for the respect for the electoral process displayed by the three main candidates and Taiwan's proudly democratic voters.

The more immediate concern in Taipei, Washington, Canberra and other capitals, is what Beijing does in the near term.

No one credible expects Beijing will go through with its pre-election war threats, but waves of economic sanctions are expected. So are intimidating drills by China's People's Liberation Army in the lead up to the president-elect's inauguration in May.

When I asked Lai at a press conference on Tuesday how he would engage with Beijing if he won, he said he was open to talk so long as there was "parity and dignity". That's the same formula Xi has rejected for the past eight years under the departing DPP President, Tsai Ing-wen.

Senior advisers to Lai have told me that they hope that China's leader may reflect on the failure of his pugnacious approach.

However, they are under no illusion, aware that Xi is not known for his flexibility.

In a stunning election-eve contribution, Beijing's top envoy in Australia made it clear just how high the stakes of Taiwan's future are for Canberra.

Ambassador Xiao Qian warned the Albanese government of nightmarish consequences if it made any "miscalculations" in its ties with the incoming Taiwanese government.

Beijing is not acting when it says it is rattled by Lai. It has spent a year portraying him to its people and the world as a "separatist" and "troublemaker". He is now Taiwan's fifth democratically elected president.

Xi's government is going to put tremendous pressure on Australia and other liberal democracies that are trying to strengthen their unofficial relations with Taiwan within their "One China" policy framework.

Taipei's long-held goal to get a free-trade agreement with Australia looks like a non-starter with Lai in power – unless there is a dramatic change of thinking in Canberra in the coming years, or a change in government.

The stakes of supporting Taiwan's application to join the CPTPP trade agreement have also risen.

Chinese diplomats could not be more explicit that it is the sort of thing Beijing would consider a grave "miscalculation". No surprise then that Canberra seems to be determined to kick both Taiwan and China's applications as far as possible into the future.

WILL GLASGOW
NORTH ASIA CORRESPONDENT

Australia has urged Xi Jinping's government to restrain from any dangerous military activities after the candidate Beijing openly loathes won the weekend's presidential election in Taiwan.

Taiwanese voters on Saturday gave the ruling Democratic Progressive Party's an unprecedented third term as President, delivering a win to William Lai in defiance of stark warnings from Beijing that electing him could trigger war.

A spokeswoman for Foreign Minister Penny Wong said it was "important that everyone respects the outcome of democratic elections," after China's ambassador in Australia launched an extraordinary warning about Canberra's future relations with Taiwan's next government.

"Peace and stability is in all our interests. Australia does not want to see any unilateral change to the status quo across the Taiwan Strait," a spokeswoman said.

Opposition foreign spokesman Simon Birmingham said it was "inappropriate" for China to try to "dictate how Australia should engage with our partners". "There is no justification for any escalation in military activities or acts that risk instability, miscalculation or misadventure," he said.

Late on Saturday night, Mr Lai said the result in the closely watched contest was a "victory for the community of democracies".

"The Taiwanese people have successfully resisted efforts from external forces to influence this election. We trust that only the people of Taiwan have the right to choose their own president," he said.

Since the former doctor was chosen as the DPP's candidate last March, Beijing has waged an influence campaign even his political opponents have admitted was unprecedented in its scale.

Mr Lai won with 40 per cent of the vote, according to Taiwan's Central Election Commission, comfortably beating Beijing's preferred candidate Hou Yu-ih from the largest opposition party, the Kuomintang, who received 33.5 percent of the vote.

Ko Wen-je from the upstart Taiwan People's Party came third with 26.4 per cent, taking votes from both of the established parties.

Diplomats and analysts expect Beijing will respond angrily to Mr Lai's victory. Economic sanctions are expected, along with intimidating drills by China's People's Liberation Army in the lead up to the president-elect's inauguration in May. Hours before the vote, China's military vowed to "smash" Taiwanese independence "plots", declaring the PLA was "on high alert".

> 'The Taiwanese people have successfully resisted efforts from external forces to influence this election'
>
> WILLIAM LAI
> PRESIDENT-ELECT

China's ambassador in Australia, Xiao Qian, also drew international attention by issuing an election-eve statement that accused Mr Lai's party of adopting a "separatist stance" and warning of grave consequences of any "miscalculations" by Canberra in its future relations with Taiwan.

Richard McGregor, a senior fellow at the Lowy Institute, said Mr Lai's victory would raise the sensitivity of the Australian government's relations with Taiwan.

"Everything about Taiwan becomes more sensitive for Beijing following Saturday's election," Mr McGregor told The Australian.

"It's one thing to try to expand your relationship with Taiwan if the KMT is in power. It's another thing to do it when the DPP's in power. It doesn't mean we shouldn't do it, but we should have our eyes open about the potential reaction."

Beijing's initial reaction to the result was relatively restrained. A spokesman for China's State Council Taiwan Affairs Office said the election result would do nothing to prevent Beijing's push for reunification.

"Our stance on resolving the Taiwan question and realising national reunification remains consistent, and our determination is as firm as rock," said Beijing spokesman Chen Binhua.

"We will adhere to the 1992 consensus that embodies the one-China principle and firmly oppose the separatist activities aimed at 'Taiwan independence' as well as foreign interference."

DPP supporters were euphoric, however the party lost its majority in Taiwan's parliament. Passing legislation in the next parliament will require the DPP getting the support of either the KMT or TPP, whose youthful support base made it the other big winner on Saturday.

In his victory speech, Mr Lai said the result in the legislature showed the Taiwanese people wanted "check and balances" over the next government. The president-elect said the result of the legislative elections showed that "there are areas we must humbly review and look back on".

Mr Lai said he would invite people from across Taiwan's political spectrum to join his government and would "carefully study the policies and positions of my two electoral opponents", looking for areas of agreement.

EDITORIAL P10
COMMENTARY P11

A giant vote for Beijing's humiliation

GREG SHERIDAN
FOREIGN EDITOR
COMMENT

William Lai's presidential election triumph in Taiwan represents a humiliation for Beijing, a strong refusal by the people of Taiwan to be bulled, a harbinger of increased strategic danger in northern Asia and both a wake-up call and a challenge for the Albanese government.

In a three-way contest, Lai won convincingly, with more than 40 per cent of the vote, well ahead of his two rivals.

Beijing had vilified him throughout the election, saying among other things that he was potentially "the creator of a dangerous war". It also worked hard through semi-clandestine social media efforts to spread disinformation against Lai and magnify digital campaigns against him.

Three times now Beijing has gone all-out to demonise a Taiwanese president or presidential election candidate. Lee Teng-hui in 1996, Chen Shui-bian in 2000, and now Lai all triumphed at the polls after gross campaigns of abuse and intimidation against them from mainland China.

It turns out Beijing is pretty bad at democracy, in practice as well as theory, which may be one reason it never tries it at home.

Lai's Democratic Progressive Party is seen as marginally more inclined to pro-independence rhetoric that the Kuomintang, whose Ho Yu-ih was runner-up. But in truth no DPP president, neither Chen from 2000, nor the incumbent, Tsai Ing-wen, has ever sought to declare formal Taiwanese independence. Similarly no KMT president, whether Lee, nor Ma Ying-jeou, in office from 2000 to 2008, has ever sacrificed Taiwan's democracy and de facto independence by accepting any path to reunification with Beijing.

In truth, all three candidates at this election had very similar policies towards Beijing: they were keen to pursue dialogue, pursue their de facto alliance with the US, planned no changes to the status quo and would not compromise Taiwan's self government and de facto independence.

It is Beijing that is trying to strangle Taiwan diplomatically and with increasing military intimidation. Any Taiwanese president would stand up against that.

Nonetheless, this election will usher in a newly dangerous period. Beijing has been humiliated, and will surely seek to further intimidate and isolate Taiwan, perhaps through direct military actions. Beijing can also see that America is divided internally: facing shocking Biden-Trump polarisations, its legal system a politicised mess, its Defence Secretary in hospital, and is fully stretched by conflict in Ukraine and Gaza. Beijing could well miscalculate and be tempted to military overreach.

This poses a great challenge to the Albanese government. After the outrageous threats from Chinese ambassador Xiao Qian that Canberra must never speak in favour of Taiwanese democracy, and must never claim that our security could be affected by Chinese military action against Taiwan, and that if we do such a thing "the Australian people would be pushed over an abyss", the Albanese government must respond to the Taiwan election at the highest level.

US President Joe Biden, British Foreign Secretary David Cameron, and other leaders have congratulated Lai, and the Taiwanese people, directly. So far, the Australian government response is restricted to a bland statement from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Xiao directly threatened the so-called "re-set" in China Australia relations if Canberra was out of line on Taiwan. Exactly because Xiao has instructed them to stay silent, Albanese and Foreign Minister Penny Wong, must publicly and explicitly congratulate Lai and the Taiwanese people.

More than that, as it has often claimed to understand, the Albanese government needs to build deterrence in the region. As it won't do anything to provide Australian military capability, this deterrence rests entirely with the US military, which Australia can at least back diplomatically. Canberra must therefore help convince Washington to remain strong on Taiwan partly by supporting the US publicly and effectively.

This will be difficult for the Albanese government as it has completely fallen apart on national security issues since it lost the voice referendum. With dereliction in the Red Sea, equivocation on Israel, tepid at best support for Ukraine, absolute failure in augmenting the defence force, and nothing much else to show diplomatically, it clings to the China re-set as the only remaining bright speck of a tattered and torn foreign policy fabric.

But that re-set should not be maintained at the expense of fundamental Australian interests and values.

AFP

KMT candidate Hou Yu-ih, left, and running-mate Jaw Shaw-kong concede in New Taipei City on Saturday night

How DeSantis, Haley can make up ground

MAX RUST
PAUL OVERBERG
WASHINGTON

With the Iowa caucuses a day away, Republican presidential hopefuls are making their closing arguments in the state, where former president Donald Trump is polling at roughly 50 per cent, according to the FiveThirtyEight average.

That puts him well ahead of Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and former UN ambassador Nikki Haley in the contest that kicks off the Republican primary season to pick the 2024 presidential nominee, in which likely less than half of all Iowa Republicans will participate.

Despite Mr Trump's lead, his rivals could find pockets of support from voters across the Hawkeye State on Monday (Tuesday AEDT).

Evangelical Protestants

With polls pointing to a close race for second place, Mr DeSantis is betting heavily on a strong performance in Iowa to preserve his viability.

A bright spot in the December Des Moines Register/NBC News/Mediacom Iowa Poll was his stronger support among evangelicals: 26 per cent compared with 19 per cent among all likely caucus-goers.

If he is to build support with those voters, it could come from places such as Sioux County, which has the state's second-highest share of evangelical Protestants, according to the 2020 US Religion Census from the Association of Religion Data Archives.

Mr Trump underperformed in Sioux County in the 2016 caucuses. Mr DeSantis might also perform well in smaller evangelical strongholds on the state's southern border, including Davis and Wayne counties, where evangelical numbers have increased significantly over the past decade compared with other parts of the state.

College-educated women

Mr Trump has support among 39 per cent of college-educated Republicans in the state, but 30 per cent of white women with a college degree, according to last month's Iowa Poll. That could give Ms Haley an opening in places such as Dallas County, where 19 per cent of all Republicans are women with a college degree, the highest rate in Iowa.

Overall, college-educated women as a share of women 25 and older in this growing suburban county have increased by more than 10 percentage points in a decade – the second-highest rate of increase among Iowa's 99 counties, which will host a combined 1657 caucuses.

Former UN envoy winning race for second in Iowa

DES MOINES: Nikki Haley has overtaken Ron DeSantis for coveted second place in the Iowa caucuses, the last poll before the event showed, but Donald Trump still leads by nearly 30 percentage points.

The Midwestern state of three million people kicks off the 2024 US presidential election on Monday (Tuesday AEDT) when its residents participate in its unusual "caucus" system to mark their preference for Republican candidates.

Former president Trump received 48 per cent of likely caucus votes in the Des Moines Register/NBC News/Mediacom Iowa Poll, which is notable for its accuracy and ability to fuel last-minute surges. Ms Haley notched 20 per cent, four percentage points up from where she stood last month. Mr DeSantis fell three points to 16 per cent.

Iowans face blizzards and a potential wind chill of -32C.

AFP

Wealthier Republicans

A Wall Street Journal poll last month of Republican voters nationwide showed Ms Haley performing best among households earning more than $US100,000 ($149,566) compared with lower-income voters. With Mr Trump enjoying his biggest support among lower-income voters, according to polls, Ms Haley or Mr DeSantis could make inroads in more affluent places in and around the Des Moines metro area, where Ms Haley has spent considerable time campaigning.

Nearly a third of registered Republicans live in the seven counties with the largest shares of Republicans whose household incomes top $US100,000, making them fertile ground for Mr Trump's rivals.

Independents

Ms Haley also appears to be relatively popular with independent voters, 23 per cent of whom say she is their first choice, compared with 16 per cent of likely caucus-goers who say so, according to the Iowa Poll. Registered independent voters can't participate in the Republican caucuses, but may register as Republicans on caucus day. If party-switching is to have an impact, Ms Haley might look to the east, specifically the Davenport area of Scott County, where Mr Trump had one of his weaker performances in the 2016 caucuses and where he lost in both the 2016 and 2020 election.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

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THE AUSTRALIAN

Taiwan poll shows island state's vibrant democracy

The election across the strait irritated Chinese Communist Party

The victory in Taiwan's presidential election of the candidate most loathed by Beijing sends an emphatic signal about the strength of democracy in the island state. As William Lai, 64, said in celebrating his remarkable success in winning another four-year term for the incumbent Democratic Progressive Party: "In the global election year of 2024, in the most anticipated first election, Taiwan has scored the first victory for democracy." China did everything possible, through intimidation and military threats, to discourage Taiwan's voters not to back what its massive propaganda campaign termed the "troublesome" and "separatist" Mr Lai. But in a free and fair election, voters effectively (and bravely) thumbed their noses at Beijing's belligerence and gave Mr Lai 40 per cent of the vote, more than 6 per cent ahead of his nearest rival, Hou Yu-ih, of the Kuomintang party. All three of the main candidates, however, including a new party, Ko Wen-je's Taiwan People's Party, whose youthful support base made it the other big winner on Saturday, had similar policies towards Beijing. The three main candidates, and voters, showed real respect for Taiwan's democratic values.

As Greg Sheridan writes on Monday, Mr Lai's triumph "represents a humiliation for Beijing, a strong refusal by the people of Taiwan to be bullied, a harbinger of increased strategic danger in northern Asia, and both a wake-up call and a challenge for the Albanese government".

Anthony Albanese should not delay in joining leaders such as Joe Biden and UK Foreign Secretary David Cameron in congratulating Mr Lai and the Taiwanese people. Australia must not allow itself to be cowed by assertions last week by Mr Xi's man in Canberra, ambassador Xiao Qian, when he warned any "miscalculations" over our ties with the next Taiwanese government would see the Australian people "pushed over the edge of an abyss". Mr Xiao warned Canberra against speaking out about "peace and stability" in Taiwan. "It is illogical and harmful to link China's internal affairs with Australia's security and safety," he said.

The Albanese government should not be intimidated by such rhetoric. Taiwanese voters, supporting Mr Lai but also his two principal competitors, have overwhelming voted for democracy and freedom and against China's Communist Party authoritarianism. Our strategic and security interests – and those of all the world's democracies – lie in backing the strong, democratically the election has demonstrated Taiwan to be. To do otherwise would be to play into the hands of Mr Xi's communist rule and that of his "no limits" best friend, Vladimir Putin. As North Asia correspondent Will Glasgow writes, China is rattled by Mr Lai: "The more immediate concern in Taipei, Washington, Canberra and other capitals is what Beijing does in the near term. No one credible expects Beijing will go through on its pre-campaign war threats, but waves of economic sanctions are expected. So are intimidating drills by China's People's Liberation Army."

Writing in these pages on Monday, Douglas Hsu, the chief representative at the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Australia, highlighted the fact that Australia and Taiwan share many values, such as vibrant democracy, respecting the rule of law and human rights. "We pride ourselves on an entrepreneurial culture that encourages people to have a go," he writes. "And we are a country willing to punch above its weight internationally by playing our part on the world stage."

Tax cuts political article of faith

Anthony Albanese and Jim Chalmers must honour their promise

However controversial the stage-three tax cuts were when legislated by the Coalition in July 2019, they should now be an article of faith among all mainstream politicians with the good of productive workers at heart. In the national interest, they must be implemented in 5½ months, in full. Trade unions, Senate crossbenchers, the Greens and some Albanese government MPs calling for the cuts to be scrapped or watered down are effectively advocating a sharp tax rise to penalise the nation's most productive workers, who have long shouldered the lion's share of the tax burden. Backtracking on the promise of implementing the stage-three cuts, which was central to Anthony Albanese's electoral pitch in 2022, would dampen incentive among workers, to the detriment of the economy and productivity.

The reforms are neither radical nor regressive, but necessary, with millions of average wage earners to be returned almost six years of bracket creep worth up to $1300 a year. Nor are the reforms unfair to lower-income earners, who received major tax relief in stage one of the reform process, from the 2018-19 tax year. Stage three will flatten tax rates, abolishing the 37 per cent bracket that currently applies to income earned between $120,000 and $180,000. Instead, a 30 per cent taxation rate will apply to all earnings between $45,000 and $200,000.

Even after stage-three cuts come into effect, new analysis by the opposition suggests tax rates for average full-time wage earners would remain higher than they were under the Howard government. Almost 700,000 workers now fall into the highest tax bracket since the threshold was last raised to $180,001 in 2009, political editor Simon Benson reports. At that time, the threshold captured just 184,167 earners. Bracket creep is "like the thief in the night ... the tax increase Australians never voted for", Angus Taylor writes on Monday.

Opponents of the stage three-tax cuts complain they will cost the budget more than $230bn over the next decade. That money, the Coalition argues, is owed back to those who earned it because the money was taken from them through bracket creep, which the cuts were designed to address.

Opinions among economists are divided about the potential impact of stage three on inflation. Independent economist Chris Richardson said last week the cuts could be inflationary, equivalent to "two to three rate cuts arriving in mid-2024". He said the most likely implication was that interest rate cuts would come later than expected. That view has been disputed by other economists, such as those at JP Morgan, which has released analysis showing the tax cuts would have a negligible effect on inflation. While Jim Chalmers says the Treasury has not provided analysis on any inflationary impacts of the tax cuts, it is implied that the tax cuts have been already factored into the department's forecasts for inflation. The Treasurer has also said that bracket creep was a priority for the government in assessing fairness in the tax system.

While opponents of the stage-three cuts have characterised the reforms as tax breaks for the wealthy, analysis from the independent parliamentary budget watchdog, commissioned by Liberal senator Andrew Bragg last June, revealed that middle Australians stand to benefit significantly from the changes. A worker earning the average estimated annual full-time wage of $105,000 in 2024-25 would pay $25,122 in income tax following the implementation of stage three, compared to $26,617 if the changes did not go ahead, the PBO calculated. Aside from short-term considerations, such as politics, growing the economic pie matters. For that reason, stage-three tax cuts will serve the economy well.

Teals colour clash in Queensland

Political mavericks, federal and state, are nothing new in Queensland. Think Bob Katter, Pauline Hanson and Clive Palmer. Despite businessman Simon Holmes a Court's Climate 200 fund seeking community-backed candidates to support at next year's federal election, teal might be one colour too many on the already garish Queensland electoral map.

Climate 200 claims "good momentum" is building in the Liberal-held seats of Fairfax, on the Sunshine Coast, and McPherson on the Gold Coast, where former Morrison government minister Karen Andrews is retiring. Teal candidates are likely to steer clear of the three Greens-held federal seats, Lydia Lynch reported last week. Judging by the teals' electoral record in Sydney and Melbourne, those three prosperous, leafy capital city seats – Brisbane, Ryan in the city's western suburbs taking in the University of Queensland, and Griffith, formerly held by Kevin Rudd, on Brisbane's southside – could have been fertile ground. But the Greens beat them to the punch.

Queensland voters are unpredictable, often backing the Coalition in seats where they strongly support Labor at state levels. If state Labor sinks in November, any knock-on effect at the federal election a few months later will be interesting.

Like other Australians, Queensland voters look to federal politicians for economic leadership, encouraging growth and jobs, keeping the tax burden in check, containing living costs, pragmatic energy policy, national security and strategic policy. To date, the teals in federal parliament have made little impression on those and other issues.

LETTERS

Woolworths' decision a 'woke' response to deep issues

I am incredibly disappointed with Woolworths' woke decision not to stock Australia Day merchandise. I am a proud fifth-generation Australian whose ancestors came here in 1830 in chains as convicts and then made very successful lives for themselves and their families.

Almost all the migrants who have arrived here since then have done the same. They have integrated and worked very hard to give their children a good education while setting high standards of citizenship.

I am very proud of my heritage and very proud to live in this once wonderful, inclusive country.

Woolworths' divisive decision to enter politics and divide our country by race was thoroughly rejected at the referendum.

Now, with its deaf ears, it is repeating this effort to divide us by refusing to celebrate pride in our country and not allowing us to choose whether or not we want to buy products that celebrate Australia Day.

Shame on you. I will, as always, be hanging my large Australian flag from our balcony and celebrating this day of freedom and love of country.

Woolworths, stick to what you are good at – selling good-quality food. Leave the politics to parliament, where it belongs.

Robyn Manoy, Darling Point, NSW

Woolworths' decision to not support Australia Day simply provides a reminder to our Indigenous peoples of their past sufferings, and offers nothing for a better, brighter future for them. Woolworths would do itself a favour were it to show support for the passionate efforts of Senator Jacinta Nampijinpa Price to assist dysfunctional Aboriginal communities towards a better life within the Australian community.

Peter Clarke, Corinda, Qld

Vitamins magnate Marcus Blackmore says Peter Dutton's call for a boycott of Woolworths is "a bit over the top".

Mr Dutton is merely reminding quiet Australians he has their back because he knows they won't put up with woke CEOs.

Similarly, all corporates should be warned that most Australians don't take kindly to over-the-top threats from other countries as well, and they could quite easily take their custom elsewhere if those companies continue to import and sell that country's goods. ("Canberra warned over Taiwan", 13-14/1).

Ross McDonald, Gordon, NSW

Instead of wasting his time calling for a boycott on individual retailers like Woolworths for not stocking Australia Day merchandise, Opposition Leader Peter Dutton would be better served by stating a clear policy on how a Coalition government led by him would support the maintenance of Australia Day on January 26 in perpetuity.

No matter what alternative date is chosen, a woke minority addicted to the black-armband view of our history will continue to be unhappy about it. Surely it's time we moved on from this pointless annual debate to more important things. Let the electorate decide if they want to maintain Australia Day as it is at the next federal election.

Les de Kretser, Indooroopilly, Qld

It is past time that people in privileged positions such as CEOs and representative sports people eschewed pushing their personal views on customers, staff and supporters when fulfilling their official duties. I doubt that these leaders obtain approval from investors/supporters for imposing their social, political or other views on the broader population.

I have no problem with them expressing their views on Facebook or similar social media outlets if this is permitted by their organisation, and where the rest of us can ignore their views if we choose, but no matter how worthy the cause do not abuse your privileged position to push your barrow on the public at large. If you are a grocer, stick to groceries, a cricketer to cricket and an airline CEO to running it competently.

Peter Bridge, Robina, Qld

Price-gouging has been obvious for a year or more and supermarkets have bluffed us all. Media has failed to address/question the gouging along the way; politicians have sat back and the Nationals have failed farmers and the public. The supermarket gouging is close to theft. It also exploits primary producers. Margins have been clearly biased to the supermarkets for a year and they have used inflation to do so.

Stuart Davie, Corowa, NSW

Passion fuelling both sides of our debate over nuclear power

How many readers accept the bald statement: "Nuclear power is necessary to secure our cleaner energy future" (Letters, 13-14/1)? We are being treated to a full-blown promotional campaign to change attitudes to nuclear power, but where is the evidence in favour of the product? The World Nuclear Industry Status Report last year noted a 4 per cent decrease in global nuclear production; it fell to 9.2 per cent, its lowest share in four decades. The NuScale SMR program in the US, despite billions in subsidies, collapsed. EDF, France's nuclear company, lost €19bn in 2023 and is €64bn in debt. Despite recently announced plans to build more nuclear plants in Britain, its existing nuclear projects are already behind schedule and over-budget. At COP28, members of the Coalition supported the 22 countries declaring support for nuclear, but this declaration appeared to be an exercise in scouring the world for "innovative financing mechanisms". Nuclear is a dying industry. Australia cannot afford nuclear: too expensive, too impractical, too late.

Fiona Colin, Malvern East, Vic

I am at a loss to understand how nuclear power "does not fit our conditions" as stated by Elaine Hopper (Letters, 13-14/1). Her argument seems to be based largely on the December 2023 report of the CSIRO, which has been repeatedly and convincingly debunked in the pages of this newspaper and elsewhere. In the same way, the myth of the "failure" of the NuScale reactor in Utah has been picked apart by commentators with a deeper understanding of the circumstances than that displayed by the Chicken Littles who inhabit the anti-nuclear constituency. Many nations whose energy policy is driven by engineering principles and economics rather than ideology have decided small modular reactors are the way of the future. Everyone agrees the temperature is rising and, while Australians continue with their irrational fear of nuclear technology (only on land, of course, not at sea where conditions are far more uncertain), we have fallen to the bottom of the waiting list for SMRs.

K MacDermott, Binalong, NSW

The Weekend Australian's front page, January 13-14

Felling forestry myths

How long, forestry lobbyists, will you go on repeating bunkum about native forest carbon? Joel Fitzgibbon ("Greenies refuse to see the forestry for the trees", 12/1) is the latest, claiming a seedling can do the work of a maturing tree. If logged, these trees release a large amount of carbon dioxide. They are 50 per cent carbon, dry weight. If left standing they will continue to capture carbon in the vital decades ahead. In Tasmania just 6 per cent of logged native forest reaches long-term products. Over half the forest is bulldozed, burned or left to rot. Native forestry emissions are higher than any other sector in the state, equivalent to 1.1 million cars per annum. It may seem comforting that comparatively few trees are felled, considering the size of the national estate. Trouble is, everyone – foresters, nature lovers, mountain bikers and big tree tourists – desire the same accessible forests. With the aid of timber recycling, agroforestry and engineered timber, we can realistically transition to plantation forestry nationwide.

Craig Brown, Eaglehawk Neck, Tas

Rebuke for Beijing

Taiwan's election result was a rebuke of the opposition Kuomintang's call for closer ties with China after a decade of military threats and economic coercion. Taiwanese companies are known for their innovation in electronics, with a history of developing cutting-edge technology, particularly in areas like semiconductor manufacturing and integrated circuits. It is Australia's fifth largest trading partner, yet we do not officially recognise it as a country for fear of upsetting Beijing

Ian Kent, Renmark, SA

Price's winning ways

What a superb choice as Australian of the Year would Jacinta Nampijinpa Price be. She is obviously a doer rather than a talker. Hopefully we will have the opportunity to see her in action as minister for Indigenous Australians, dealing decisively with her areas of major concern.

Bill Pannell, Dalkeith, WA

Temperature check

Could someone please rush over to Murray Watt's office and tell him that if you live in Australia's tropical north you can expect cyclones at any time in the summer, and any number of them. ("Storms the norm: minister says bad weather is here to stay, 13-14/1") Also, if you live near a river you can expect floods at any time. This has nothing to do with any grand plan by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, or any other climate "scientist". It is what happens, has always happened and will continue to happen. Senator Watt has got himself into a lather and is trying to panic people. The next thing is he will have a solution to this perceived problem and it will be about money and political power.

Jeff Rookyard, Bowral, NSW

LAST POST

Steve Waterson has a millennial colleague who has read Orwell's 1984? ("Older, but sadly not much wiser", 13-14/1). Come on, pull the other one.

Terry Birchley, Bundaberg, Qld

The US and UK send ships and planes to the Middle East to protect vital shipping lanes: Australia sends ... words.

Bryan Welsh, Tea Gardens, NSW

Prime Minister Albanese has left the building and cannot be found. Meanwhile, urgent matters affecting the nation require immediate attention, eg, Australian involvement with the freedom of navigation in the Middle East requires maritime involvement. Laws need to be strengthened to put an end to anti-Semitism. Australia Day date needs to be finalised, preferably January 26.
If anyone finds the Prime Minister tell him firmly he is required back at his desk and that difficult decision-making comes with the job.

William Wright, City Beach, WA

It won't be long before organic tofu and lentils replace Aussie lamb on Australia Day barbecues.

Peter Sesterka, Hawker, ACT

Perhaps Opposition Leader Peter Dutton could patent T-shirts and coffee cups with a picture of himself, wrapped up in the Australian flag, and offer them to Woolworths at an irresistible price?

Kevin Burke, Sandringham, Vic

Re ("Gender quotas threaten Labor grip on state", 13-14/1): shouldn't that read "gender quotas threaten Labor grip on reality"?

David Masters, Chermside, Qld

The irony is that in Hamas-controlled Gaza the same-sex Perth couple would have faced persecution and violence for their homosexuality before they had a chance to even contemplate a Jewish sperm donor.

George Fishman, Vaucluse, NSW

Infectious diseases physician Peter Collignon thinks Covid-19 will stay with us for another 40 years and that our governments are unlikely to reintroduce mask mandates. Masks and vaccinations are the only way to combat the virus. I just don't know why when people wear masks these days others assume they already have Covid, and are not trying to avoid it? We need to encourage mask wearing, not taboo it.

Mokhles Sidden, South Strathfield, NSW

It would be far more productive for Foreign Minister Penny Wong to visit Papua New Guinea at its time of need, rather than a "tick the box" trip to the Middle East, which will achieve nothing.

Geoff Davey, St Lucia, Qld

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BOOKSHELF | JAMES MARRIOTT

It's memoir's poetic title that gives the game away

As a book reviewer, one quickly learns to develop a bracing scepticism about one's relevance to the culture at large. I do not think many people will read this review.

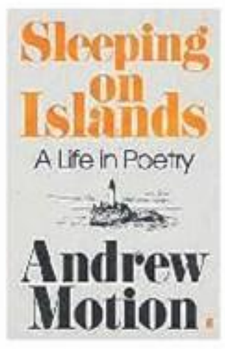
Whatever tenuous threads once connected the name Andrew Motion to the consciousness of the literate public are already breaking and fraying. For the few of you who have bafflingly elected to persevere with this article (O, band of brothers!), we should begin by clearing things up. Motion is the man who used to be Britain's poet laureate. Oh come on, you know. Looks a bit like Simon Schama. Came in between Ted Hughes and Carol Ann Duffy. Once wrote a "rap" on the occasion of Prince William's 21st birthday ("Better stand back/ Here's an age attack/ But the second in line/ is dealing with it fine" – no, I didn't make that up). Still nothing? Oh well, you're not alone.

"Andrew Morton ... the royal biographer?" hazards one friend catching a glimpse of the modestly-orange review copy of Sleeping on Islands shoved in my jacket pocket when we meet for an after-work pint. I explain that it is not a book about Morton, but the memoir of the former poet laureate Andrew Motion. You know. Looks a bit like Simon Schama. Wrote that rap ... Nope. "I suppose he must have had an interesting life," my friend says cautiously, unwilling to get me on to the subject of poetry (I'm prone to spontaneous recitation). I answer truthfully. "No, he didn't, really ... " The friend – a lawyer – shakes his head at the futility of my profession.

In fairness to Motion, this memoir might usefully be described as a meditation on the futility of being Andrew Motion.

"Edward Thomas had described himself as a superfluous man, and I thought I knew what he meant," he writes in an early chapter. The reader thinks he knows what he means too. Sleeping on Islands is a record of the cosseted academic and literary worlds through which Motion, now 70, has moved for most of his life.

He writes that as a young lecturer at Oxford he found himself "stifled by privilege" and longing for "a less pampered environment". He does not mean that he felt called to coalmining or war reporting, but that he wanted to move to another English literature department at a less prestigious university. Perhaps it is inevitable that the dramas of such a life should acquire a faintly unreal air, as if they are taking place in a padded and soundproofed room. Well, I could only read on, my eyes narrowing with envy, as Motion hopped from the cushioned berth of an English department to a snug living as the poetry editor of Chatto & Windus to the gilt and velvet footstool of the laureateship.



Sleeping on Islands: A Life in Poetry
by Andrew Motion
Faber, 310pp, $29.99

REVIEW

More book reviews in The Weekend Australian

But the subdued atmosphere is principally a function of the book's style. As with his poetry, Motion's prose aims at a Wordsworthian solemnity and plainness. The still surface is presumably intended to be suggestive of subaqueous profundities and dramas. But all too often the reader feels he has been confronted with a millpond of a man. The author's character presents a turbid and unruffled blank.

For an explanation we might look sympathetically to Motion's early life, which was marked (like Wordsworth's) by a terrible maternal tragedy. Motion's vivacious, arty mother was paralysed after falling from a horse. She eked out the remainder of her life in a hospital bed barely able to move. It was not until three years after her fall that she opened her eyes and spoke – "in a strange deep rasp".

The horror of the accident condemned Motion to a melancholy home counties adolescence in the company of his father, a brewer, who was "suffocating in sadness" and prone to bluffly complaining that his bookish son was growing "liverish" through neglect of manly outdoor pursuits. But the tragedy did not spur Motion to rebellious, extravagant reaction. You feel his character is still shaped by the suppressed and inarticulate atmosphere of that grief-stricken household.

Nevertheless, the muted tone means it is surprising when halfway through the book Motion confesses to an attempted murder. He recalls that once when walking in the Lake District, he kicked a rock down a mountain at some hikers, unleashing a dangerous fusillade of stones and boulders. But the murderous avalanche missed and the hikers didn't die. If they had, it might have leavened the book's strange atmosphere of inertia. Motion believes the incident "uncovered something destructive" in himself, an "appetite for ruin". But that appetite is not in evidence in Sleeping on Islands.

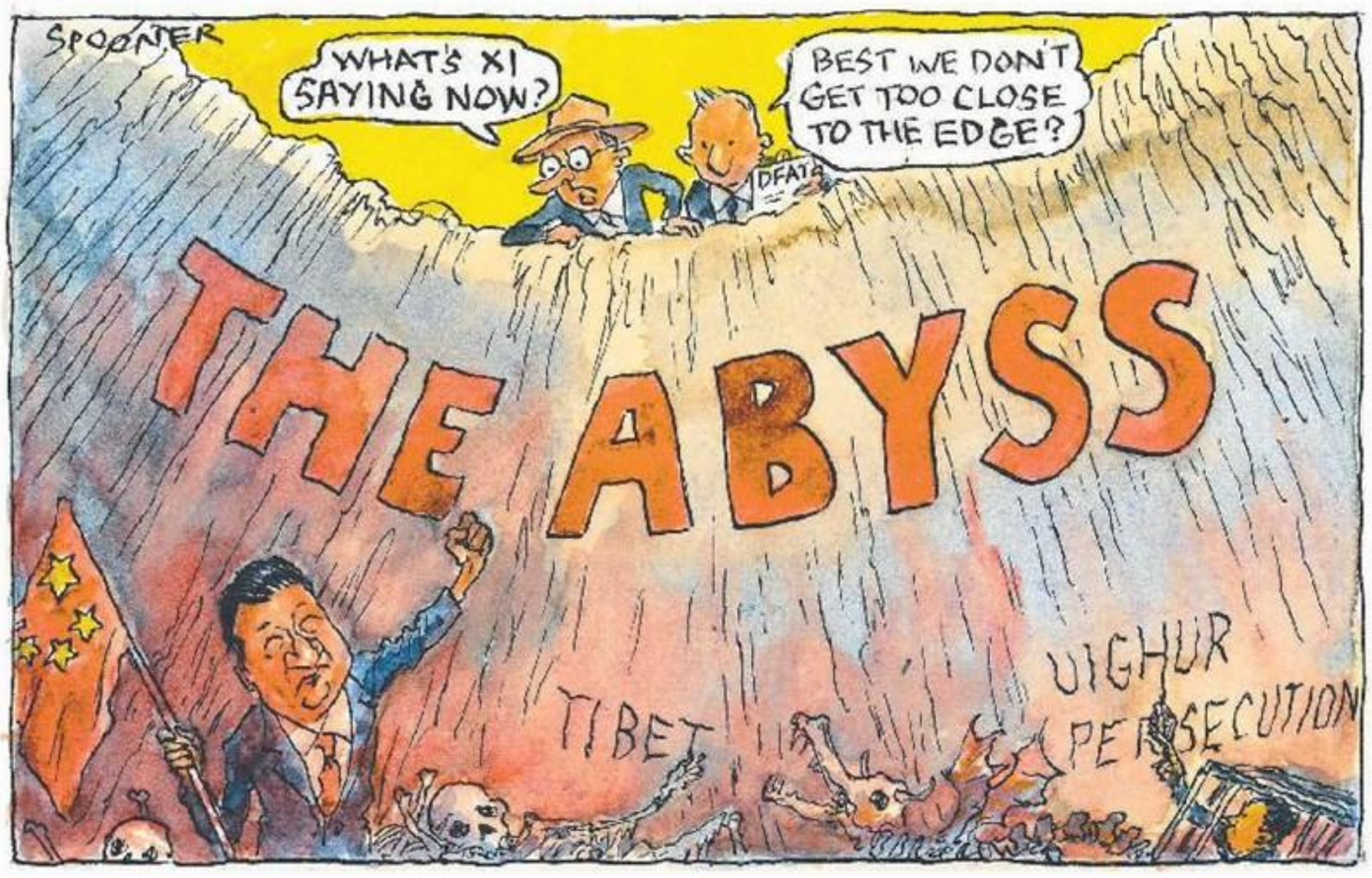
If Motion does have an identifiable passion it is not for mountain climbing but social climbing.

But poets do not find immortal fame in lectureships, chairs or presidencies. Poetic fame requires something else entirely.

THE TIMES

COMMENTARY

DAILY CARTOON | JOHN SPOONER



NICK CATER

Woolworths' Australia Day ban half-baked

Fairy bread hot cross buns went on sale on Boxing Day in Woolworths, the supermarket chain that is as true-blue, you-beaut Aussie as the rest of them when it wants to be.

This year Woolworths launched a novel adaptation of what it called "an iconic staple at Australian kids' parties" sold with its own little packet of hundreds and thousands, allowing customers to butter and sprinkle to taste.

In a further gesture of pretend patriotism, Woolworths announced the return of apple cinnamon-flavoured hot cross buns made with 100 per cent Australian-sourced Pink Lady apples. These will sit alongside the Cadbury Caramilk range made with confectionery 100 per cent sourced from Chicago-based Mondelez International, the proud custodian of the Cadbury® brand.

The expansion of Woolworths' hot cross bun range was announced in a 569-word press release that neglected to include the word "Easter". It would be comforting if that were an oversight, but we know it probably wasn't, since Easter, like Australia Day, comes with cultural baggage Woolworths, in its mealy-mouthed way, would rather avoid.

The decision to de-Easterise the spiced, fruity bun was presumably a response to the same kind of "broader conversation" that prompted Woolworths' decision to denationalise January 26. It will sell cancer-causing, coronary-inducing sticks of tobacco to adults who produce their ID, but won't sell Australian-themed summer entertaining merchandise to anyone under any circumstances in deference to the sensitivities of the virtue-signalling elite.

Discussion about the meaning of Australia Day is anything but broad. It is depressingly narrow. Participants are drawn from the same restricted circle and the conservations restricted to the same prescribed boundaries as the Aboriginal voice to parliament.

Woolworths got that one wrong too, incidentally. Management ordered staff at Big W to make excruciating announcements affirming "support for the Uluru Statement from the Heart, and its calls for a First Nations voice to parliament enshrined in the Constitution". Woolworths sensed the change in the wind and dropped the announcements three months before the referendum. "We recognise and respect our team and customers have varying views and perspectives," a spokesperson said.

Indeed, they do. Six out of 10 Australians voted no to the referendum. Woolworths hasn't told us if it bothered to ask its customers before turning its back on Australia Day. If it did, it must have confined its sampling to its Marrickville and Carlton stores. You don't have to venture far into HiLux land to learn that few outside activist circles want change, any more than they wanted the voice. Australia Day serves as the full-stop to January, a final day of indulgence with family and friends that is too precious to waste wringing guilty hands. The verdict on the voice reflected the widespread sentiment that nothing good can come from picking at the scabs of history.

The annual assault on Australia Day has noticeably intensified this year. We have long passed the point where it was possible to have a measured discussion about other possible calendar slots or linking it more overtly to Federation rather than settlement, the Australian commonwealth being a great civic success story well worth celebrating.

It is not just January 26 some object to but Australia Day itself. What purports to be an argument about dates has morphed into something more frightening, an argument about the legitimacy of the nation itself. Like the clowns behind the 1619 project in America, the invasion day movement wants to assassinate our national character. Advocates want to strip our founders of any noble intent and portray them as beyond redemption.

Which is why Peter Dutton should not heed the contemptuous commentators who criticised him for buying into the argument last week. When our shared sense of national pride is being deliberately eroded, we need leaders who are prepared to shout "stop".

Dutton captured the popular sentiment as he did on the voice by suggesting Woolworths customers boycott the store until the decision is reversed. That is easier said than done, given the company holds 37 per market share, but many of us are prepared to keep on trying in the faint hope that market forces might come to the support of common sense.

The Prime Minister knows better than to dive headlong into the invasion day rhetoric. Last year, he described January 26 as "a day to show respect to First Nations people", which is an awkward choice of words. Does that mean it is a day to disrespect non-Aboriginal Australians or that the obligation to respect Indigenous Australians does not apply on other days of the year?

It was a rejection of special privilege and the politics of identity, and a declaration of equal respect for all as fellow citizens.

The case against Australia Day, like other social justice causes, rests on faulty but emotionally tempting logic: we should avoid overt pride in Australia, we are told, out of cultural sensitivity to our multiethnic and Indigenous population. Yet it is precisely because we lack a shared common racial identity that pride in nationhood is so important.

That hasn't been something we've had to work too hard to sell up to now since most migrants are attracted by the freedom, prosperity and opportunity a successful liberal democracy has on offer.

When permission to migrate to Australia is difficult to obtain, migrants arrive with a sense of having won life's great lottery. They arrive pre-primed to become proud Australians and to defend its values.

One wonders if any of those responsible for Woolworths' soft-headed decision have ever been to an Australia Day citizenship ceremony and watched newly minted citizens from every corner on Earth raise their right hand in a pledge of allegiance. They would have to search hard to find anyone adopting citizenship through gritted teeth, burdened with even the slightest degree of national shame towards their adopted country.

I write this out of personal experience, as someone who looks back to January 26, 1992 as the day when I made one of the most consequential decisions of my life.

Good columnists should avoid using the singular first-person pronoun where possible. On this occasion, however, I seek the readers' indulgence to express my offence at the trashing of an anniversary I hold so dear.

No amount of fairy bread buns can redeem Woolworths for its un-Australian decision or its thinly disguised disparagement of a country almost every migrant regards with undiluted affection.

ANGUS TAYLOR

Stage three tax cuts Labor's next broken promise?

Australians deserve an unambiguous commitment to stage three tax cuts. Trust is a crucial part of our democracy. We must be able to trust our governments to act in the country's best interests and to make difficult decisions for the greater good.

Unfortunately, it has become difficult to trust the Albanese Labor government. The first 18 months of this government have been full of broken promises.

Labor has broken its promise to make life cheaper and easier – speak to any Australian and they will tell you their budgets are being stretched to the absolute limits. Labor promised to cut power prices by $275 a year. But since it came to power, electricity has gone up by 23.1 per cent and gas by a whopping 29.5 per cent.

Labor has repeatedly broken its promise on limiting tax increases to multinational companies – raising taxes on everything from franking credits, retirement savings, small businesses and Australian companies.

Labor has an unprecedented wealth tax on unrealised capital gains before the parliament, and the Treasurer's Productivity Commission review into charities is targeting religious charities and non-government schools next. And now it appears Labor has been considering another broken promise, this time on stage three tax cuts.

Last week, the Prime Minister was asked to guarantee the legislated tax cuts will not be amended in the May budget. He failed to do so. We've also recently learnt through a freedom of information request (by Capital Brief) that the Treasurer sought advice from his department about changing the policy.

This shouldn't come as a surprise though, because Labor was never committed to the stage three tax cuts. In opposition, the Treasurer and Prime Minister said so themselves. When the tax cuts were legislated, they moved and voted for amendments to abolish them. The Treasurer did so twice, saying "we must remove stage three" from legislation and that it was the "right, responsible and constructive thing" to do.

The Prime Minister is once again playing weasel words around not changing his position, but his record of broken promises makes it difficult to believe him.

What Australians need right now is an unambiguous commitment. The reality is, during this cost-of-living crisis, the stage three tax cuts are absolutely crucial.

Australians are being burnt at both ends under Labor. On the one hand, Australia has the most entrenched inflation in the world and one of the highest core inflation rates of any advanced economy, with prices rising by almost 10 per cent since Labor came to office – the equivalent of doubling the GST. On the other, after 18 months of inaction, Labor has plainly decided the way out of inflation is to tax Australians more. This might help the macroeconomic indicators in the budget papers, but Australian households lose out. You can't tax and spend your way out of inflation. You can't spin your way out either.

National Accounts data, released before Christmas, showed that in the first 18 months of Labor's time in office, personal income tax had increased by a record 27 per cent.

Analysis of tax and ABS statistics shows the number of Australians in the top tax bracket has doubled in the 16 years since it was introduced, while middle-income earners have seen their effective tax rates increase significantly from 17, 10, even five years ago.

Bracket creep, driven by rampant inflation, is the thief in the night. It is the tax increase Australians never voted for. And it will continue to erode Australians' pay packets. It is why delivering the Coalition's stage three tax cuts is essential.

Combined with the corrosive impact of inflation, households are struggling under Labor's taxes. On Labor's watch Australians' real household disposable income has fallen more than any other advanced economies. This is crucial context when considering the future of the Coalition's stage three tax cuts. The tax cuts ensure most Australians will know they keep at least 70 cents of every dollar they earn – whether starting a business, taking a second job or putting their hand up for a promotion. That is an unbelievably compelling proposition that rewards effort, innovation, risk-taking and investment.

Australians deserve a simpler and fairer tax system – one that boosts productivity by rewarding aspiration and productivity, not punishing it. One of the key factors fuelling our inflation problem is low productivity, which has collapsed under Labor. The collapse is unprecedented and among the very worst of any major advanced countries.

For middle Australian households that have been waiting 18 months for the government to take action on the cost of living, a decision the Coalition made five years ago offers the first glimmer of hope. It is essential Labor stand by this tax cut and make fiscal headroom in its budget to allow for it. The government has spent an extra $209bn since the election – that's more than $22,000 per household.

Labor has the levers to manage its budget in a way that is consistent with delivering the stage three tax cuts and putting downward pressure on inflation. But it will require spending discipline Labor has yet to demonstrate. The tax cuts are a good start in giving back the money stolen from hardworking Australians through bracket creep. Lower taxes remain a core goal of any good government.

Angus Taylor is opposition Treasury spokesperson.

MIKE KELLY
ANTHONY BERGIN

Getting on the front foot to help pave way for Gaza's future

Foreign Minister Penny Wong arrives in Israel this week with an opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of key developments to better inform our approach to the Israel-Gaza war.

The minister will also be able to convey Australian ideas that might be helpful to the longer-term peace process and outline possible Australian contributions.

Hopefully, she will take the opportunity to visit the Israel-Gaza border communities where she would gain a close, personal appreciation of the brutal, sadistic savagery and genocidal regional Islamist agenda of Hamas. Having this perspective should help form a sound position on Israel's right and need to prosecute the war against Hamas and to ensure Israel, and the wider world, is never again subject to this kind of evil.

Wong's visit comes in the wake of the four-point "day after" plan recently floated by Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant. There's now also intense US diplomacy focused on crafting a way forward from the war to a two-state solution.

Gallant's plan involves Israel supporting the establishment of civil governance and being responsible for inspecting incoming goods. A multinational taskforce, led by the US, in partnership with European and moderate Arab nations, would take responsibility for running civil affairs and the economic rehabilitation of Gaza. Egypt would take responsibility for the main civilian border crossing into Gaza, in co-ordination with Israel. Existing Palestinian administrative mechanisms would be maintained, provided the relevant officials were not Hamas operatives.

Local authorities, dealing with basic services, would continue to function in collaboration with the multinational taskforce. Israel would retain overall security responsibility through the gradual implementation of this process.

The proposed approach is fundamentally sensible. It makes use of available power structures other than those that are violently hostile. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has flagged the need for a "reformed" Palestinian Authority. The Arab states have declared that Gaza must be placed under PA control – the goal of the US as well. These positions could be reconciled with the right approach to implementation.

> 'No doubt the Foreign Minister will find that there is a marked reluctance by some in Israel to support a role for the Palestinian Authority in the day after'

Wong will benefit from her hosts explaining the broader context of the Hamas threat: it's part of the "rectangle of rogues" (Russia, Iran, China, and North Korea) with their array of active conventional threats, through to the use of proxies and grey zone strategies.

No doubt the Foreign Minister will find that there is a marked reluctance by some in Israel to support a role for the Palestinian Authority in the "day after". But building a viable PA that would have any credibility in Gaza means that it would also need the confidence of the West Bank Palestinian community. It's in this context that Wong might convey the need for Israel to roll back settler outposts, and subject them to proper law enforcement. This will also free Israeli governments from the perennial threat to their policy discretion and costs that these settlers generate.

The Foreign Minister is expected to visit the PA in Ramallah, where she should convey to her Palestinian interlocutors the impediments to peace on the Palestinian side. These include the PA eliminating its support for and acclamation of terrorists, ending the incitement in the education system, and dealing with dysfunction and corruption.

Australia can offer help in building a long-term culture of democracy in Gaza and the West Bank. This might involve training civil servants, technical advice and support, performance monitoring, accountability measures and education reform.

Australia contributed to PA state institution building in 2005 by providing an Australian army officer to the international team working to create the PA security sector. Sadly, this mission fell apart when Hamas waged a civil war against the PA in 2007, killing 600 Palestinians and dismantling the police, judiciary and other democratic institutions.

When the war ends, Australia could offer reinvigorated institution building efforts in Gaza through the training of the security sector, including in accordance with human rights standards, the judiciary, civil service skills and ethos and education that doesn't disseminate racial hatred and glorify terrorism. Our contribution might include designing and operating key performance indicator monitoring, detection of insider threats, tracking of transactions and finance and accountability mechanisms.

We could offer civil affairs contributions in Gaza as part of an international taskforce. We might, for example, offer to consider expanding our observer contribution in the Multinational Force and Observers in Sinai, very close to Gaza, to support Israeli and Egyptian efforts to ensure neutralisation of Hamas if the two states agreed.

Our extensive history of meaningful engagement in the region, our long-term support for a two-state solution, the broader implications for managing global threats and our own social cohesion suggest we should be on the front foot in offering effective support to move the peace process forward. But that must be done with eyes wide open with no blank cheques and proper oversight.

Mike Kelly is a former federal minister and co-founder of Labor Friends of Israel. Anthony Bergin is a senior fellow at Strategic Analysis Australia, and an expert associate at the National Security College.

DOUGLAS HSU

Democratic Taiwan proud to stand with regional partners

Tracking the Taiwanese presidential election probably is the last thing on the mind of most Australians right now: an ambitious summer reading list, finding a parking spot at a crowded beach, or remembering your password to logon if you're unlucky enough to be back at work might sit a bit higher on your priority list.

So as Taiwan's chief representative here in Australia, it's part of my role to help keep you up to date.

In a competitive three-way election, Dr Lai Ching-te (William Lai) from the ruling Democratic Progressive Party, who just won the election last Saturday, will form a new government in coming months and is expected to continue the policies of incumbent Tsai Ing-wen's administration.

The people of Taiwan have held democratic elections since the 1990s. Although we are not quite as practised as Australia, ours have almost always taken place, and done so in the face of military coercion and interference by China.

In the past this has taken the form of military exercises, rhetorical threat, economic coercion and other tactics such as disinformation and the spread of conspiracies.

So, it's not surprising the Chinese ambassador to Australia stated in his opinion article published online by this newspaper on Saturday, and timed just before Taiwan's election, that if Australia has any "miscalculations" in Canberra's ties with the new Taiwanese government, this will see the Australian people "pushed over the edge of an abyss".

He also stated, "Taiwan belongs to China" and this is "an inalienable part of the Chinese territory since ancient times".

In fact, democratic Taiwan is widely commended by the international community and has never been part of the People's Republic of China since its establishment in 1949.

> We are determined to staunchly defend Taiwan's security and national sovereignty, as well as freedom

Taiwan maintains 112 representative missions in more than 70 countries, enjoys substantive ties with nations around the world, and plays an indispensable role in global supply chains and resisting authoritarian expansionism.

Our government has always honoured the political mandate bestowed by the Taiwanese people through democratic elections, and respected the rule of law and human rights.

We are determined to staunchly defend Taiwan's security and national sovereignty, as well as freedom and democratic ways of life.

It is also our unwavering commitment to work with like-minded partners to maintain peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and the Indo-Pacific region. As events transpire as a result of Taiwan's election, I urge Australians to open their eyes to the many values and ways of life we share, which can bring us closer together despite the geographical distance between Taiwan and Australia.

Taiwan is a vibrant democracy supported by the rule of law.

We pride ourselves on an entrepreneurial culture that encourages people to have a go.

And we are a country willing to punch above its weight internationally by playing our part on the world stage.

Australia is close in trade and economic terms, too: Taiwan is Australia's fifth-largest trading partner, with two-way trade worth $32.6bn.

Taiwan and Australia are both democracies in the Indo-Pacific region: an increasingly rare thing.

Our region is home to about four billion of the world's population and generates almost 60 per cent of global GDP, but it is a region that is not dominated by democracies.

According to the Lowy Institute report, only 54 per cent of the regional population live under democracy.

So, Australia and Taiwan are more than just partners, we are members of the same community of nations in this vital global region. We are leaders in the international community, and role models for those striving to have their governments listen to their voices.

We ask all Australians for their support and for their voices as we work together to preserve the status quo of peace and stability across the 180km of water that separates China and Taiwan.

As I watch my homeland peacefully transition to a new government, I hope Australia will join with our other international friends and partners and applaud another democracy in action and support us as we engage on the world stage.

Douglas Hsu is the representative at the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Australia.

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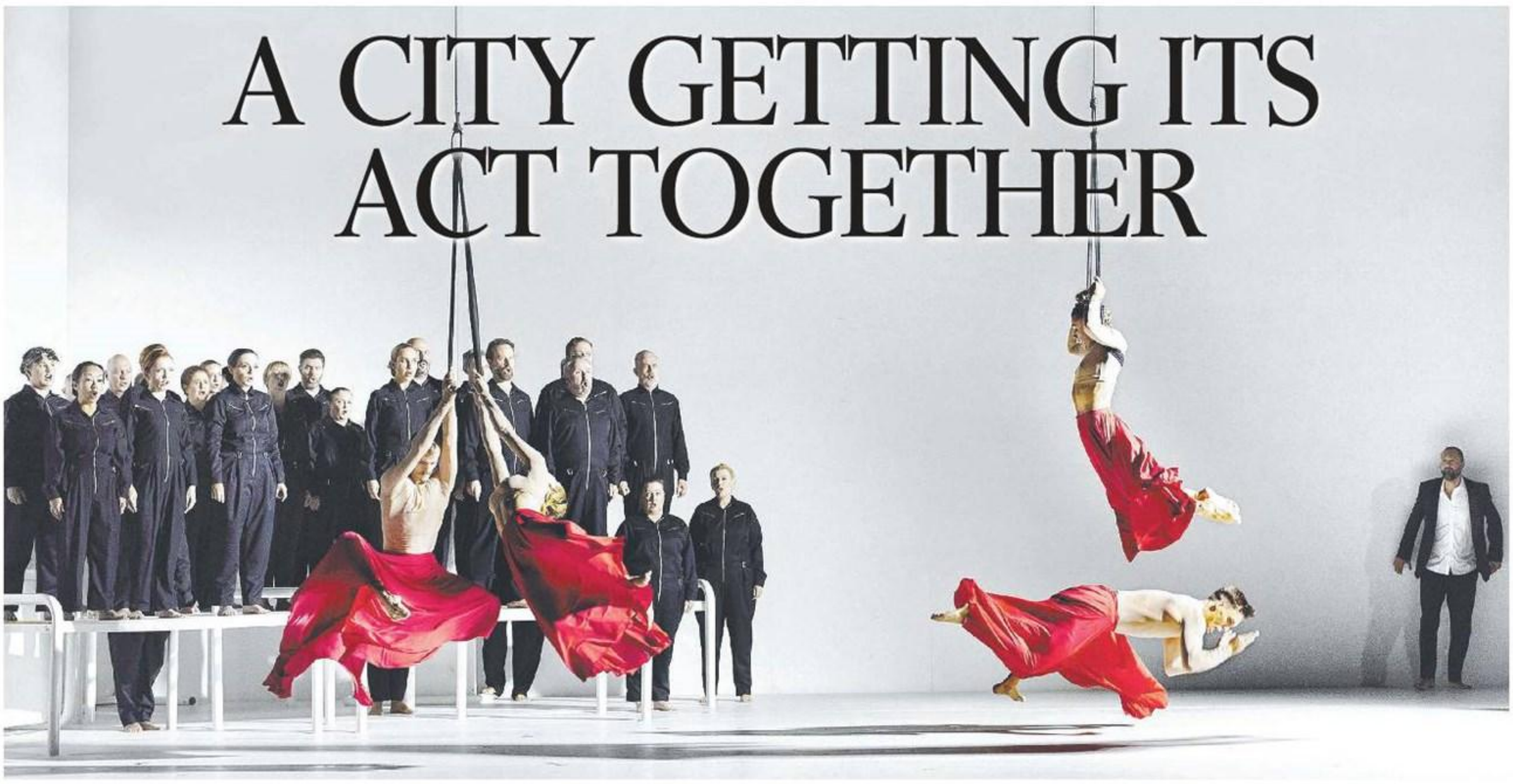
A CITY GETTING ITS ACT TOGETHER



The Walsh Bay Arts Precinct has plenty going for it as a permanent hub for the 'summer asset' Sydney Festival

MATTHEW WESTWOOD

Sydney has many natural splendours but being a natural festival city isn't one of them. There have been too few venues, too far apart, for the city to enable the kind of show-hopping that is possible in, say, Edinburgh or Adelaide – two of the world's great cities for performing arts jamborees.

Even with the majestic Opera House at its front door, Sydney has lacked a natural town square or a meeting place that can be designated a festival "hub".

Olivia Ansell, delivering her fourth program as director of the Sydney Festival, has an attractive solution to the problem. The recently redeveloped Walsh Bay Arts Precinct and its two adjacent piers – home to Sydney Theatre Company, Sydney Dance Company, the Australian Chamber Orchestra and others – is an almost ideal location for the festival to call home. It will become even more so later this year when the Sydney Metro underground train line is due to open, with a convenient station at nearby Barangaroo.

For the festival's duration, the precinct has been decked out as the "Thirsty Mile", with pennants and colourful beach umbrellas, an inflatable art installation called Hi-Vis, and the all-important festival bar. People are out and about, seeing shows across the program, then having a drink and talking about them afterwards. That's what a festival should be.

"We are one week into the festival, and having the hub with eight or nine theatres going at once is a real success and a real home for the festival," Ansell says.

"The Harbour Bridge behind us, the harbour in front, the fact all these arts organisations sit beautifully side by side – what a way to show off Sydney in summer, and be that distinctive summer asset that the Sydney Festival is."

As may be appropriate for a summer festival, Ansell's program keeps the tone upbeat but not insubstantial. Storytelling through music – whether dance, opera, musical theatre or cabaret – is very much in the foreground; deep-dive epic theatre, not so much. The festival opened at the Sydney Opera House on January 5 with a crowd-pleasing Brazilian dance company in Encantado, by renowned choreographer Lia Rodrigues. A joyous celebration of movement and improvised play, the piece had 11 exuberant dancers twirl, sculpt, and wrap themselves in an array of 140 colourful, patterned blankets.

Ten days in, the festival has proceeded without the disruptions of recent years from pandemic, rain and the 2022 boycott by pro-Palestinian protesters. Ansell says the festival team has been proactive in talking with different community groups and stakeholders. Indeed, it's encouraging this year that the program can include, for example, both a Palestinian artist, Aseel Tayah, and a Jewish artist, Deborah Conway, who has spoken recently about the frightening rise of anti-Semitism.

Making its world premiere at the Roslyn Packer Theatre is Big Name, No Blankets, a jukebox musical about the rise to fame of 1980s group Warumpi Band – the first rock act to record a song in a First Nations language.

A band that hits the big time and then crumbles under the weight of personal and artistic differences is a story familiar enough. What's different here is that Warumpi Band was forged in the remote community of Papunya, its core members being Sammy Butcher and his brothers, along with singer George Burarrwanga from Elcho Island and whitefella Neil Murray.

Their music will take them from the outback to the pub rock scene in the big cities, and eventually to Europe. When Dire Straits come calling it would seem Warumpi Band has truly hit the big time – but for some in the group the lure of home is too strong to resist.

Circa acrobats and the Opera Australia Chorus in Orpheus and Eurydice, top; a scene from Encantado, by choreographer Lia Rodrigues, above; a scene from Big Name, No Blankets, about the rise of Warumpi Band, left

It all unfolds in about 100 minutes, no interval, on a single set with a live band on stage, evocative projections and roadies' crates standing in for mountains or canoes as required. On stage throughout is the tin humpy and campfire that is the desert home and emotional beacon for the Butcher brothers, who only ever wanted to have fun making music.

The energy flagged in the spoken-word scenes on opening night but the musical numbers were terrific. Baykali Ganambarr plays Sammy with quiet assurance as the "peacemaker" of the group. (No pressure with the real Sammy Butcher in the audience.) Googoorewon Knox steals the show as charismatic frontman George, whose encore of My Island Home – sung in his Yolngu language – and Blackfella/Whitefella bring the audience to its feet. Cassandra Williams is very good playing all the female roles, and the ensemble is rounded out by Teangi Knox as Gordon, Aaron McGrath as Brian, Jackson Peele as Neil and Tibian Wyles as Ian.

The show has been five years in the making with substantial input from Sammy Butcher – the sole surviving Aboriginal member of the group – and his children and kin. It may not be immediately evident to outsiders, but the producers are proud of the show's cultural integrity, having been developed by First Nations people including writer Andrea James, Butcher and his daughter, Anyupa, and director Rachael Maza.

It has backing from all the major capital city arts festivals, so expect to see it in other cities across the next year or so.

Another festival premiere about a black Australian artist is Send for Nellie, the story of singer and entertainer Nellie Small, who worked the nightclub circuit in Sydney beginning in the 1930s, and who appeared on tour with the Port Jackson Jazz Band.

You wonder why this show business pioneer isn't better remembered today. Born in Sydney, she had a West Indian father, took to wearing men's suits, sang in a manly register and, the show hints, was possibly gay.

Send for Nellie, by playwright Alana Valentine, is presented as a cabaret-style show at the Wharf Theatre, decked out with red drapes and with some of the audience seated at small theatre tables. Elenoa Rokobaro in white top hat and tails gives a very good impersonation as Nellie, singing standards of the era such as On the Sunny Side of the Street and Stormy Weather. Eleanor Stankiewicz plays several roles including Nellie's landlady, and does a risque version of the Groucho Marx comic number, Lydia the Tattooed Lady. The onstage band is led by Zara Stanton.

Nellie Small encountered the prejudices that might be expected in mid-20th century Australia, but she stood up to bigots just as she fought against restrictive entertainment licences. I left the show wanting to know more about her.

A make-believe band, or bands, is the subject of Bananaland, by Kate Miller-Heidke and Keir Nuttall, having its second outing at the Riverside Theatre in Parramatta after its premiere at last year's Brisbane Festival. It's the story of punk band Kitty Litter whose song, Bananaland, is a satirical allusion to Clive Palmer's incursion into federal politics. When the song becomes a surprise hit with children, it sparks an identity crisis: should Kitty Litter stick with their anti-Establishment rebelliousness, or embrace the mainstream and become, gasp, a children's band?

The pretentious faux-punk of Kitty Litter is less convincing than the smile-till-it-hurts cheesiness of the reformed band now known as the Wikki Wikki Wah-Wahs. Miller-Heidke and Nuttall – who had a previous hit with Muriel's Wedding the Musical – have fun in the show's much stronger second half as the band negotiates the hazards of sudden fame. Max McKenna leads the band as Ruby, supported by bandmates Georgina Hopson, Maxwell Simon and Joe Kalou. Director Simon Phillips keeps everything buoyant and there are very funny character performances from Dave Eastgate, Amber McMahon and Chris Ryan.

Two excellent opera productions opened at the festival last week. Opera Australia is presenting Gluck's Orpheus and Eurydice as staged by director Yaron Lifschitz and his Brisbane-based company of acrobats, Circa, in a production first presented by Opera Queensland.

Gluck's reform opera of 1762 may not seem the most obvious candidate for circus treatment, but Lifschitz's sensitivity to music and drama makes it a winning combination. It is, after all, a story about love, grief and the power of music. At the Sydney Opera House, Lifschitz stages it on a minimalist set in what could be a morgue or psychiatric ward. The acrobats' aerial and balancing acts are an exciting counterpoint to the music's classical poise and virtuosity.

Leading the cast was exceptional French countertenor Christophe Dumaux as Orpheus and rich-toned soprano Sandy Leung stepping in at late notice as Eurydice and Amore. Conductor Dane Lam leading the OA Orchestra brought out the score's drama and diaphanous textures.

The Australian National Maritime Museum at Darling Harbour is the inspired location for an outdoor performance of Puccini's one-act opera, Il Tabarro (The Cloak), directed by Constantine Costi and presented by Victorian Opera. The action is staged on the lightship Carpentaria, a red-hulled floating lighthouse built in 1917 and in service until 1985. There is certainly plenty of maritime atmosphere: the lightship rocks as the singers move about the deck, the city skyline forms the backdrop, and seagulls fly overhead in the evening twilight.

Costi uses the setting most effectively. In their soaring duet when Giorgetta and lover Luigi sing with nostalgic longing for their home town, Costi has them both on the lightship's upper level around the lantern, bathed in light.

It was a treat to hear as Giorgetta soprano Olivia Cranwell, who last month appeared as Sieglinde in the Brisbane Ring Cycle. Simon Meadows as her older husband, Michele, and James Egglestone as Luigi brought out their characters' tenderness and menace. The outdoor performance was necessarily amplified, and the orchestra under conductor Simon Bruckard, playing from a nearby barge, brought Puccini's score to life.

Still to come in the festival are Mutiara, a dance piece about Broome's pearling industry by Indigenous company Marrugeku; the visiting GoteborgsOperans Danskompani from Sweden; a mini-festival of the music of JS Bach in Temperament; Sydney Symphony Under the Stars at Parramatta Park, and; a play with a palindromic title, Are We Not Drawn Onward to New Era.

Sydney Festival has not released figures about ticket sales and visitor numbers for this year's event but Ansell is delighted with the reception so far.

"We attract visitors directly for the festival, but we also attract visitors who might be here for other reasons, like New Year's Eve or the cricket or the tennis, and they find out about us," she says.

The Sydney Festival continues until January 28.

Family and duty: the last days of the queen

MEGAN AGNEW

The final hours of the Queen's life on September 8, 2022, at Balmoral are recounted in Robert Hardman's just published book, Charles III: New King. New Court. The Inside Story.

1. "Buzzy" before dinner: On the evening of September 6, the queen was "energised", having met the departing prime minister, Boris Johnson, and his replacement, Liz Truss. The queen's horse, Love Affairs, had won the 3.05pm at Goodwood. "She was quite buzzy over pre-dinner drinks," said one person in the party, which included her daughter, Princess Anne, and her oldest grandchild, Peter Phillips. "But then she said she was going upstairs to have dinner alone."

2. Last-minute cancellation: The queen spent the following day in bed, still intending to appear via video link, from her bedroom, at the Privy Council meeting that night. But with minutes to go, councillors were told she would be cancelling "on medical advice".

Queen Elizabeth II meets then prime minister-elect Liz Truss at Balmoral Castle in Scotland on September 6, 2022

JANE BARLOW/AFP

3. "Think how you'd feel": Charles was at Dumfries House in Ayrshire. By the evening of September 7, the Princess Royal and the Charles's private secretary, Sir Clive Alderton, were advising him to leave for Balmoral. "They were both saying to him: 'Think how you'd feel if you never said goodbye'," one member of staff told Hardman. The next morning, the Princess Royal called and told him to come at once. He and the Duchess of Cornwall touched down in a helicopter at Birkhall, their home on the Balmoral estate, just before 10.30am on September 8. They had to borrow an "elderly" Land Rover, which Charles himself drove to Balmoral.

4. Cold reception for Harry: According to Hardman's book, Prince William's team liaised with Prince Andrew and Prince Edward's teams. The RAF arranged for an Envoy IV light transport plane to fly from RAF Northolt, west London, to Aberdeen.

In his memoir, Prince Harry says he "immediately texted Willy" after the call from their father, "to ask whether he and Kate were flying up. If so, when? And how? No response". Harry says he and Meghan looked into their own flights, until, according to his memoir, he received a call from his father telling him to come alone. He chartered his own plane.

5. William's lucky break: Catherine, then Duchess of Cambridge, however, had "certainly not" been asked to stay away, according to Hardman. Instead, it was decided she would stay with her three young children, who were due to start school. "It was by luck rather than judgment, but it made it a lot easier to tell Harry he was coming alone," said an aide.

6. Mushroom picking: According to staff, people were still "thinking in terms of days rather than hours" – and so the Prince of Wales and Duchess of Cornwall went to the grounds of Birkhall. Charles went mushroom picking, and Camilla went for a short walk.

The queen was left to rest in bed, watched over by the Princess Royal, Angela Kelly, the queen's dresser and Dr Douglas Glass, her local GP, while Rev Kenneth Mackenzie, chaplain to the queen, read the Bible.

7. Time of death: At 3pm, Glass received an urgent call to come upstairs and Charles and Camilla were summoned back. By the time Glass got to the bedroom, the queen "appeared to have stopped breathing". The queen's private secretary, Sir Edward Young, phoned Charles, who was driving. He was "addressed as Your Majesty for the first time", writes Hardman. "No further explanation was needed."

8. Calling the princes: Charles was put through to William, and then to the Duke of York and Earl of Wessex. Harry was airborne and, according to palace staff, out of reach. "There were repeated attempts to get through to him," an official told Hardman. In his memoir, Harry said he found out from the BBC as he landed.

9. Her final request: In the queen's final red box were two letters, one to Young, and one to the new King, which remain private. It also had her shortlist for the Order of Merit, which included Floella Benjamin, the campaigner, and Paul Nurse, a geneticist. "It was the last document handled by Queen Elizabeth II," writes Hardman. "Even on her deathbed, there had been work to do. And she had done it."

THE SUNDAY TIMES

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THE AUSTRALIAN BUSINESS REVIEW

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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BIG GAMBLE

Technology gurus bet on the future in Las Vegas {P15}

PAUL BRENNAN

Financial markets may have it wrong on interest rate cuts this year {P19}

SECOND CHANCES

Luxury hand-me-downs worth billions of dollars {P17}

FLOTATION ENERGY REJECTED DESPITE JAPANESE SUPPORT, VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT BACKING

Top wind project blown away

EXCLUSIVE

COLIN PACKHAM

Flotation Energy, backed by one of Japan's largest companies and earmarked as a leading developer of offshore wind in Victoria, has been denied a development licence by the federal government.

The preliminary decision to not grant Flotation Energy a licence comes despite the venture being awarded major project status and allocated more than $2m by the Victorian government to kickstart the work.

Victoria has placed offshore wind at the centre of its plans to wean off coal, and has allocated $40m to three companies to begin work on projects.

Flotation Energy was awarded just over $2m for scoping studies and surveys, which it began late last year when it was awarded major project status by the federal Labor government, cementing its place as a leading developer.

Following those moves, Flotation Energy was widely regarded as Victoria's second most advanced offshore wind project, after Star of the South. Major project status gives developers favourable access and assistance from Australian authorities.

Flotation Energy – based in Scotland, where it has already developed a smaller offshore wind project – further advanced its case for a licence when it was acquired by Japan's largest electricity utility, Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO), providing the developer with access to a large pool of development funding.

But in a decision that is likely to irritate Japan, one of Australia's closest regional allies, Flotation Energy has been informed that it has been preliminarily rejected for a licence to develop in Victoria.

> 'How can Flotation not be in the top 12? It is a ridiculous decision'
>
> INDUSTRY SOURCE

Japan last year voiced concerns about Australia's energy policy, insisting the government's perceived lack of commitment to gas amounted to Canberra "quietly quitting" the industry. Japan is one the largest buyers of Australian LNG.

Flotation Energy did not respond to requests for comment from The Australian. Would-be developers have signed non-disclosure agreements barring them from revealing details of discussions with regulators and the government.

A total of 24 projects were rejected in the preliminary decision after being deemed less "not as meritorious" as others.

That label has been described as ludicrous by some observers, given Flotation Energy has demonstrated it has experience developing offshore wind projects and access to significant capital – two criteria the National Offshore Petroleum Titles Administrator deemed vital in guidance issued to would-be developers in 2022.

Six projects have been preliminarily awarded a so-called feasibility licence and six more could be awarded the coveted prize if they are able to overcome boundary disputes with other developers.

Feasibility licences give projects exclusive rights over a region for seven years, which is critical for attracting investment.

"How can Flotation not be in the top 12? They have developed offshore wind and it has TEPCO as a backer. It is a ridiculous decision," said one industry source.

It is not clear whether Flotation Energy could yet sway Australian authorities when a final decision is announced.

A spokesman for Energy and Climate Change Minister Chris Bowen said: "The department received 37 applications for offshore wind developments in the Gippsland zone, which is extremely encouraging.

"Based on the advice of the regulator, the minister has made preliminary decisions on feasibility licences but won't be making any further comment until proponents have had the opportunity for feedback, in keeping with

Continued on Page 14

Ellis rejects concern about RBA changes

EXCLUSIVE

GLENDA KORPORAAL

Former Reserve Bank assistant governor Luci Ellis has rejected concerns that the proposed monetary policy-setting board could radically change interest rate settings in Australia.

In an interview with The Australian, Ms Ellis, who is now chief economist with Westpac, said she believed appointees to the board would take the same considered approach that the existing RBA board members had in the past.

Former Reserve Bank governor Ian Macfarlane has expressed serious concerns about the proposed board – a recommendation of a recent review of the central bank – warning that it could undermine the authority of RBA governor Michele Bullock, and pave the way for potential tensions between external members and the bank.

Mr Macfarlane has warned that the proposed changes are a "huge risk," describing the plan to set up a body where the two RBA members could be outvoted by six outsiders as an "experiment".

"I can totally understand why Ian has interpreted the review document the way he has," Ms Ellis said.

"The way (the review committee) wrote (the recommendation) did leave them open to that interpretation.

(But) I think, as a practical outcome, the change will be smaller than he fears.

Ellis

"I think it will be more business as usual in the sense that it's going to be mostly the same people.

"They will be doing things in broadly similar ways."

Mr Macfarlane has warned that the proposed nine-person monetary policy-setting board, which will also include the Secretary of the Treasury, will be a decision-making body where the governor and the deputy governor of the RBA could be outvoted by the six newly appointed independent members.

He said it was not clear what type of people would be appointed to the new board, noting that the two RBA board appointments made by the Albanese government last year had both come from an ACTU background.

Treasurer Jim Chalmers has defended the proposals, saying that the new monetary policy-setting board would have the same member structure as the existing RBA board.

But, while successive treasurers have previously appointed new board members to five-year terms as vacancies emerged, the

Continued on Page 16

TCorp CIO braces for rising volatility

GAYE GERARD

TCorp will be scrutinising risky assets more thoroughly as it expects increasing turbulence on stockmarkets and elsewhere

PAULINA DURAN

Stewart Brentnall, who manages the NSW government's fund management arm, says increased policy intervention and market volatility in coming years, driven partly by geopolitical tensions, will require the $109.9bn TCorp fund to increase its risk tolerance.

Investors would have a tough time adapting to higher interest rates and inflation after decades of price stability and low rates, with private equity and real asset investments facing a particular challenge because of their dependence on leverage, said Mr Brentnall, who has been TCorp's chief investment officer since 2017.

"In the short term, we no longer have that policy setting that has pushed long-term bond rates down and encouraged money into equities," he said. "Inflation, interest rates, and probably foreign exchange rate settings will be more market-driven than policy-driven over the next few years.

"And because of the increasing importance of geopolitics in markets, we are going to have a more volatile time where there will be more frequent bouts of inflation, whether that be because of demographics and pockets of demand, or whether it be because of recurring supply issues in constrained markets."

That volatility would force central banks to become more proactive in controlling inflation "both up and down" through monetary policy over shorter cycles, Mr Brentnall said.

"We expect shorter term and more volatile cycles, more profound, more proactivity from reserve banks, potential bouts of inflation, and therefore, more interesting and potentially challenging market environments."

Brentnall

While the settings had changed, the fund – which manages assets backing NSW's State Super defined benefit pension, state insurance liabilities, as well as special purpose funds – was "still expected to deliver the same returns, maybe for a bit more risk", he said.

"That lends itself to a slightly more dynamic approach in fund management. And it lends itself to test our risk budget a bit more strongly and make sure that we are really using every element of the risk budget that we're given."

For TCorp this means scrutinising risk more thoroughly as well as a higher tolerance for it.

TCorp last year embarked on an efficiency program led by NSW Treasurer Daniel Mookhey that included merging six government funds worth $43bn into one.

The consolidation of the six funds is expected to be completed by the time the 2024-25 state budget is released later this year. It "will deliver operational efficiencies as well as considerably higher returns, which will reflect an investment strategy employing a more efficiently used risk budget", Mr Brentnall said.

"The Whole of State Fund will not have constraints and limitations that some of the current individually-run funds (do). This is a further example of driving higher returns from better use of risk in the challenged investment environment we are in."

Last year, Mr Mookhey also scrapped debt-funded contributions to the NSW Generations Fund, a debt retirement fund created by former premier Dominic Perrottet. It was seeded in 2018 partly with the proceeds of the sale of the WestConnex motorway. Mr Brentnall said it would not receive allocations until the state budget is in positive territory.

He said inflation in places like Australia and the US was unlikely to continue declining all the way to the 2-3 per cent targets, but he

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Watchdog turns up the heat on greenwashing

Australia's chief regulator wants to be feared by the financial services sector, as the anti-greenwashing push heats up amid a move to mandatory disclosures from corporate Australia.

But industry figures have warned the Australian Securities & Investments Commission's greenwashing offensive risks taking with it the burgeoning ESG-focused funds management world and slow the pace of investment swinging away from coal and gas and towards clean and green assets.

Speaking late last year, on the sidelines of the ASIC annual forum, chair Joe Longo noted he did not shy away from accusations the regulator's actions were having a chilling effect.

Mr Longo said he made "no apology" about the regulator's greenwashing enforcement efforts, which have seen ASIC pursue financial giants, including Mercer and Vanguard, in the last year over claims made in documents to investors. "There's no doubt that greenwashing is a very harmful activity," Mr Longo said.

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COMPETING BIDS
with JONATHAN CHANCELLOR

A slice of history in lovely Lorne

A dress-circle Lorne home has been listed for the first time in seven decades by descendants of the **Peardon** grazier family.

Sitting beneath blue gums, the mid-century beach house comprises two pavilions, with extensive decking overlooking the ocean on Victoria's popular Surf Coast. It was built for **Jean** and **Albie Peardon,** who did not have far to holiday since their farm was Killuran, at Birregurra, just 40 km inland.

Jean, who loved surfing and skiing, was from the **Reid** family of Miller's Creek Station, Willow Tree in NSW and the **Bickford** family from South Australia.

The Lorne offering last traded at £4500 in 1956 when it was bought from **Beatrice Manifold**, a descendant of the acclaimed brothers who arrived from Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) to settle the Western District of Victoria in 1844. Beatrice was the wife of grazier **Edward Manifold**, whose estate on his 1931 death was valued at £500,000.

The owner of the Lorne offering at the turn of the 20th century was **Frank Armytage,** whose grazing holdings included nearby Spray Farm, which last traded when bought by former ANZ boss **Mike Smith** and his wife **Maria** in 2014.

Ian Stewart of Great Ocean Road Real Estate is marketing the unrenovated abode on its 1278sq m Smith St block, with $3.9m to $4.3m price guidance. Offers close January 29, allowing potential buyers to inspect after their skiing trips abroad.

There was also the weekend distraction of the 44th Lorne Pier to Pub swim. Entrants included Goldman Sachs Australia chairman **Josh Frydenberg** who completed for the 10th time, clocking the 1.2 km in 27 minutes and 35 seconds. His wife, **Amie**, did it in 25 minutes and 52 seconds, against her prior best time of 22 minutes.

Frydenberg's best time was 22 minutes 6 seconds in 2016. His mate and now local hotelier

Continued on Page 14

Tech, retail lead decline in vacancies

Employers should have an easier time finding workers if the number of applicants for job ads is any indication, and more Australians are expected to be out of work this year. Data from online employment company Seek shows that national job ads were down 17.4 per cent in the 12 months to December.

Ads for tech workers were down by 32 per cent, followed by retail and hospitality sectors (down 27 per cent), which have been impacted by a pullback in consumer spending as households deal with cost-of-living pressures and inflation.

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A slice of history up for grabs in lovely Lorne

Continued from Page 13

Justin Hemmes did it on Saturday in 20 minutes 24 seconds in his first race.

It was while holidaying in January 2019 at the beach house of his parents, **Harry** and **Erica Frydenberg**, that the then federal treasurer crafted his stage three tax cuts legislation, which will likely have a big impact on the property market when it takes effect from July 1.

Historic Waverley sold

Waverley, an 1880 freestone two-storey mansion on Lorne's front row, was snapped up just two days before the new year and well ahead of its scheduled January 20 auction, with no price disclosure.

The renovated five-bedroom house on its 1930sq m Deans Marsh Rd holding, opposite the Erskine River, had come with $4.2m to $4.5m price guide through Abercrombys agent **Jock Langley**. Its new owners will use it as their principal residence.

The property dates back to pastoralist **Simon Staughton**, who was a relative of the Armytages. It was then was owned by the wool-broking **Lascelles** family for eight decades until 1987. Jock's late grandfather **John Langley** had been the CEO at the Dennys, Lascelles Ltd firm which was acquired by Elders in the late 1970s.

Listed initially at $5,250,000 in late 2022, Waverley last sold at $2m in 2010.

Changing demographic

Lorne, like many coastal towns across Australia in the past, saw buyers from the bush feature as a sizeable demographic. They would hit the beach each summer, especially when the profits flowed on the farm. Sometimes Lorne was even reported in the Melbourne social pages with equal billing to Portsea's swish soirees.

These days 60 per cent of Lorne sales are buyers two hours away in Melbourne, with Geelong at 15 per cent a distant second, and then the western Victorian postcodes occupying third place, according to Stewart. He won't be surprised if local owners trade up to the blue chip Smith St location.

Lorne has been the coast's strongest market, with PropTrack senior economist **Paul Ryan** saying its house median rose 3.48 per cent in the past quarter. But Lorne's $1,913,000 median was down 1 per cent annually.

Barwon Heads was next priciest with a $1,612,000 median, followed by Anglesea at $1,559,000 and Queenscliff at $1,459,000.

Southern comfort

Retired NSW farmers **Max** and **Roz Graham** from Galong on NSW's southwest Slopes, were the $12m buyers of the record-setting Narrawallee beachfront on the NSW South Coast, which had been listed with a $14m to $15m guide through Atlas.

Clockwise from above: Views from the Borambil apartment in Manly; Lorne's Waverley, a two-storey freestone mansion; and a house on the beach in Lorne

The $12m beat the previous record $10m beachfront at nearby Mollymook in 2021.

The Grahams had just sold Argyle, their 1800ha Galong aggregation for $34m. It specialised in beef and lamb, carbon and regenerative agriculture.

Roz Graham nee Sylvester first came to bush fame when she won the Sydney Royal Easter Showgirl title in 1965, starring in the six bars jump competition on her horse, Hedgehopper.

Borambil beauty

The imposing seven-storey Borambil apartment complex set directly above the surf club at Manly owes its origin to the **Matchett** grazing family. The 34-apartment Bower St block was built in 1930 to a design in the florentine style by architects Peddle Thorp & Walker after the landmark Bowercliff residence was demolished.

Taking its name from **W. G. Matchett's** central-western Condobolin property, Borambil was built for £44,000, said to be the proceeds of one wool cheque from the farm on the Lachlan River. There had been a £60,000 total cost, inclusive of the land.

The apartments were let by the family with the company title block converted to strata in 1972. They retained the largest for their beachside holidays until the 1980s.

The four-bedroom apartment fetched $8.02m last month when sold to interior decorator **Rachel Rutherfurd**, having previously sold for $3,475,000 in 2021.

Eisens expand

It was the sale by retired graziers **John** and **Ilone Small** that saw Afterpay co-founder **Anthony Eisen** and his interior designer wife **Samantha** increase their beachfront holding on Wategos Beach in Byron Bay last year.

The Eisens spent $23m to buy from the Smalls, who were in the recruitment business but considered themselves graziers from Triangle Flat, Bathurst.

The fintech entrepreneur had bought three doors away in 2018 for $7.6m from farmer **Charlie Arnott**, the eighth-generation sheep and cattle farmer from Boorowa in NSW.

There are just 12 houses on the Wategos strip with the flag still flown by the **Crothers** dairy farming family from Victoria.

Fresh Eyre

Ealing, West London-based Australian businessman **Mark Scherrer**, who co-founded aerospace company Ferra Engineering, has acquired an Eyre Peninsula, South Australia farm complete with Tyringa Beach title last year for $1.65m through CBRE Agribusiness agent **Phil Schell**.

The 1117ha holding on the Great Australian Bight about seven hours from Adelaide was bought from the **Cash** family.

The acquisition follows the 2022 sale of the Ferra business to the US supplier Accurus Aerospace for around $350m.

$9.45m in Kingscliff

Prestige beachfront sales have kicked off the year with a landmark Kingscliff mansion fetching $9.45m last week, ranking it as the NSW Tweed coast's most expensive beachfront.

North Point Residence, a resort-style offering spanning three blocks, had been on and off the market since late 2019.

Designed by **Paul Uhlmann**, the 2009 house was sold by **Sarah** and **Andrew Johnson**.

Nick Witheriff of LJ Hooker Kingscliff sold it to a holiday home buyer from Melbourne.

It bettered the previous nearby $8.97m record which was bought by **Gail Kellow**, wife of **Glenn Kellow**, the former chief executive of Peabody Energy, the world's biggest coal miner.

The sale highlighted the role of mining industry buyers as a very strong beachfront demographic.

Labor blows away top wind project

Continued from Page 13

procedural fairness," he said. If it cannot overturn the decision, Flotation is on course to be the first heavyweight casualty of an increasingly competitive battle to develop offshore wind in Victoria.

Some of the world's largest renewable energy developers and local giants last year lodged applications to develop off the coast of Gippsland, moving to capitalise on Victoria's plan to use the zero-emission energy source as a major replacement for coal.

The Victorian government in 2022 set a target of generating the equivalent of about 20 per cent of its energy needs from offshore wind within a decade. The target then doubles to 4GW by 2035 and 9GW by 2040. In all, Victoria sees potential for 13GW of offshore wind capacity by 2050, five times the current renewable generation in Victoria.

Victoria's coastline is ideal for offshore wind. Winds are very strong and consistent by international standards, while a large area of shallow ocean less than 50m-60m deep is suitable for wind turbine platforms to be fixed to the seabed, a much more mature and cheaper technology than the floating turbines that have to be used in deeper waters.

Victoria's plans, however, were dealt a blow this month when federal Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek vetoed a key pillar of Victoria's offshore wind strategy, citing a "clearly unacceptable" risk to local wetlands at the port of Hastings.

The site was supposed to be an epicentre of the offshore wind industry in Victoria, but now the state will need to revise its plan and hope Ms Plibersek endorses the revised project.

The rejection has created a degree of uncertainty over the industry, which Victorian officials have tried to address. The Australian understands officials contacted the would-be developers to assure them that a timetable for much anticipated contracts-for-difference – the mechanism by which generators will earn revenue – will proceed next year as planned.

But officials continue to grapple with lingering problems, with boundary disputes over six projects still to be resolved.

Six "meritorious" projects must undergo a boundary dispute resolution process.

The Australian understands meetings on the issue are scheduled for late January, while developers have yet to be told which other projects they overlap with.

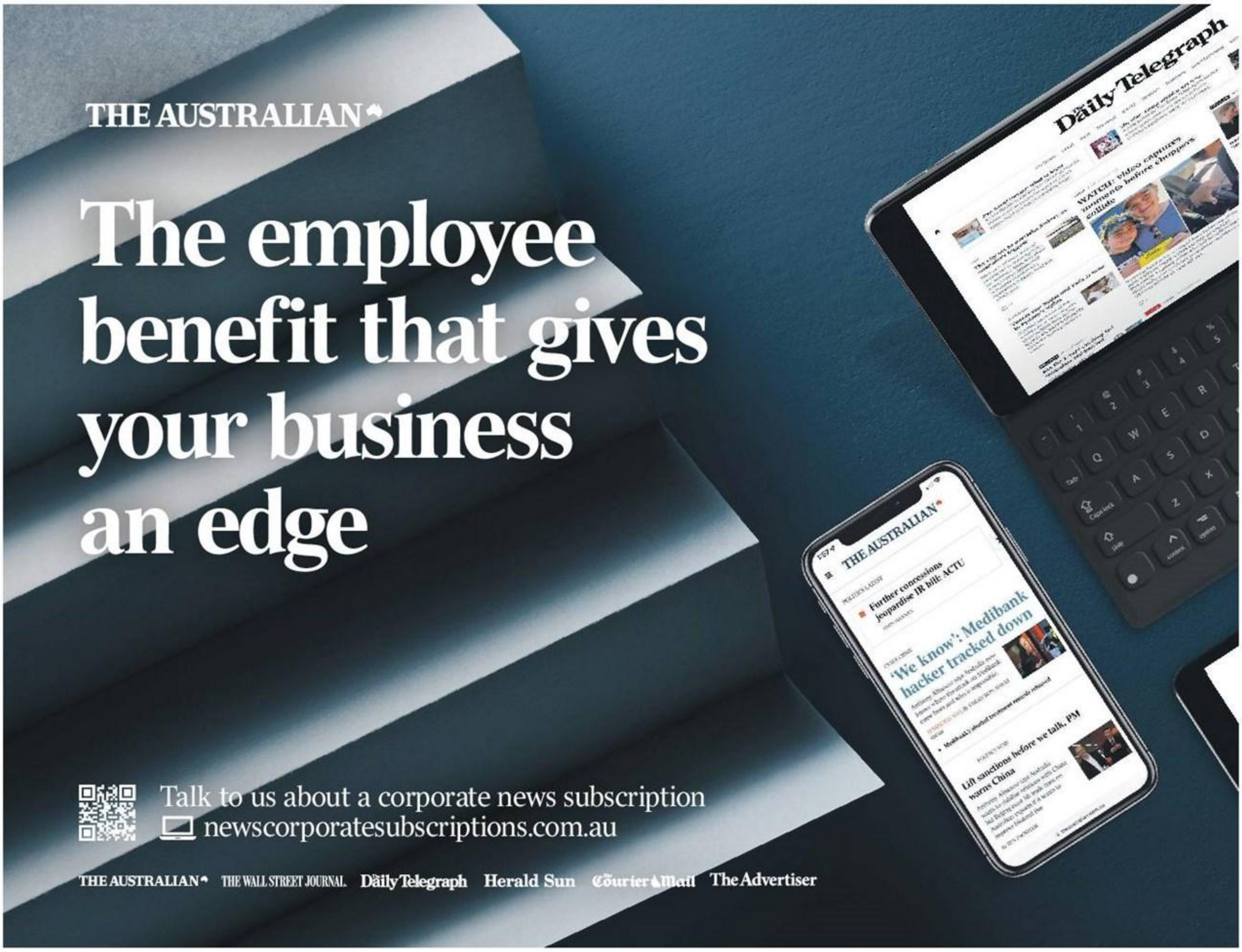
Banker to settle fraud claims

Morgan Stanley will pay $US249m ($370m) to settle civil and criminal charges connected to stock trades where it disclosed key information that it promised to keep confidential.

The conduct concerns large equity trades in which Morgan Stanley trading staff between 2018 and 2021 leaked information to hedge funds, resulting in about $US72.5m in improper profits, according to a US Department of Justice press release that announced the deferred prosecution agreement. Morgan Stanley also reached a civil settlement with the Securities and Exchange Commission.

Both agencies also charged Pawan Passi, the former head of its equity syndicate desk, with fraud. Mr Passi faces a $US250,000 civil penalty and reached a parallel deferred prosecution agreement with the Justice Department.

AFP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Tech and retail lead decline in vacancies

MATT BELL

Employers should have an easier time finding workers if the number of applicants for job ads is any indication, and more Australians are expected to be out of work this year.

Data from online employment company Seek shows that national job ads were down 17.4 per cent in the 12 months to December due to a slowdown in the economy.

Ads for tech workers were down by 32 per cent, followed by retail and hospitality sectors (down 27 per cent), which have been impacted by a pullback in consumer spending as households deal with cost-of-living pressures and inflation.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics this week releases the latest labour force figures for December, and economists expect the unemployment rate to remain steady at 3.9 per cent and 18,000 jobs to be added – compared with 61,500 jobs created in November.

Seek said Victoria experienced the sharpest decline in the number of job ads in the past year with volumes down 25 per cent, followed by a 23.3 per cent decline in the country's largest state of NSW, and 16.2 per cent in the ACT. The Northern Territory was the only jurisdiction to have had an increase – at 1.8 per cent.

> 'Businesses are now having a deeper pool of people to employ'
>
> BRENDAN RYNNE
> KPMG CHIEF ECONOMIST

The falling rate at which employers sought to hire staff has meant that there are more workers for every job ad, which increase 6 per cent in the month to December. This came as national job ads rose 0.5 per cent in the month.

"For only the third time in 18 months, job ad volumes rose in December," Seek managing director Kendra Banks said.

"The rise was supported by an increase in demand for trades and services workers, specifically labourers, welders and boilermakers, and gardening and landscaping roles."

Tasmania was the best location for job ads growth in the past month; the state was up 5.6 per cent, followed the NT at 1.6 per cent and Queensland on 0.7 per cent.

Education had the smallest decline in job ad volume in the past year at 5.9 per cent, but volumes fell 3.5 per cent in the month to December as institutions wound down for the academic year.

Separately, the "Keeping us up at Night" survey of 319 senior executives by KPMG released earlier this month showed that fewer senior executives were concerned about finding talent, with 42 per cent citing it as an issue for the year ahead, compared with 77 per cent in 2023 and 69 per cent in 2022.

"With the added migration and also domestic workers also starting to look around a little bit more, businesses are now having a deeper pool of people to employ," KPMG chief economist Brendan Rynne said.

Rynne said that the unemployment rate would be around 4.5 per cent by June and close to 5 per cent by the end of the year.

A unemployment rate at nearly 5 per cent would be highest reading since 2022 and would come in much higher the RBA's expectation of 4.25 per cent predicted in its statement of monetary policy in November.

Minutes from the RBA's meeting in December showed that the central bank was concerned that more Australians could be out of work this year than it had forecast as full effect of its record run of rate rises weaves through the economy. The concern was one of the reasons it moved to keep the official cash rate on hold at 4.35 per cent at its December meeting.

Job ads by industry
(Dec 2023) % change year-on-year

Information & communication tech -31.9
Retail -26.9
Hospitality & tourism -26.8
Administration & office support -22
Manufacturing, transport & logistics -19.3
Community services -17.3
Trades & services -14.8
Healthcare & medical -13.4

Job ads by state

Source: Seek

Technology gurus bet on the future in Las Vegas

JOSEPH LAM

Real-time image manipulation is changing the world, altering what's in front of us to become clearer, sharper – and sometimes removing things altogether.

That manipulation is taking place at all levels, with newer devices incorporated the technology not just at the processing stage but also at the moment of capture.

The outcome could be a clearer, brighter image – or a still shot turned into a moving image, able to bring the deceased momentarily back to life.

The technology was on full display at CES this week. The huge trade show drew 130,000 people to halls, meeting rooms and conference centres across some of America's most lavish casinos in Las Vegas.

About 4000 exhibitors were there to present their latest feats of technology, with many setting up what they believed to be the home of the future.

In the Eureka Hall, where start-ups the world over promote their dreams, a Taiwanese business called LightMatrix showcased its 3D photo frame.

"All the photos we use are actually 2D and once uploaded into our cloud we can turn them into 3D in about 10 seconds each," said Ting Ting Feng, one of the company's representatives.

The technology within the frame allowed the human eye to view 3D imagery without the need for 3D glasses.

Canon was also playing in the same field, showing how a regular image could be turned into 3D with the use of its in-house AI tools.

Meanwhile, over at the Samsung booth, a new monitor designed for gamers worked in a different fashion but with a similar outcome.

It uses using two cameras which track head and eye movement and then, with the use of AI, adds an effect that makes the game appear in 3D, based on the user's head position, the Australian vice-president of consumer electronics, Jeremy Senior said.

On the nose

Tracking eye movement has come a long way for some.

Another start-up based in South Korea has developed a pair of earphones that can change a song or pause what's playing, based on a wink or a blink.

Yoosung Kim, one of the men behind the start-up called ID.EARS, explains that their device can also be used for health, monitoring the user's chewing speed.

"We can then analyse that munch rate and let you know if you're eating too fast and the kind of health effects associated with that," he said.

Tech devices to be worn on the human face are also on the rise, mostly disguised as sunglasses and earphones.

One such device, sunglasses that double as earphones, is called Lemuna.

Hong Kong-based founder Sean Wang said what was unique about his technology was the ability to customise, changing glass arms with a single twist.

AFP

Thousand visited the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas this month

AFP

Devices for pets were a focus of the technology show, left, and Samsung's new AI-powered robot Ballie, right

See-through tech

Transparent technology garnered the most interest at CES this year, and LG and Samsung were the clear show stopper on that front.

But other, much smaller brands are also in the running, with a start-up called Vxion debuting what it calls a "smart film".

The technology isn't glass – rather a film made with polymer liquid crystals. It can cycle between displaying content and returning to a completely transparent state.

Size matters

Not everything was about being invisible. For some, it was about being as big as possible.

Laser TVs with projecting screen sizes of up to 300 inches have emerged as the huge screen TV trend continues to gain ground. Hisense is one player in that game, having introduced its TV operating system into its projector line-up.

Projectors are proving more popular across the board, with newer models beginning to give some TVs a run for their money in terms of resolution.

Samsung has introduced an 8K projector in its Premiere line-up. The device can project up to 150 inches in size from just 12 inches away from the screen. It also has the technology to upscale films shot in 4K and 2K.

Another technology called Freestyle can turn the corner of a room into a screen thanks to auto-stabilising and correcting technology.

At LG, old was new again with a retro-styled projector capable of supporting 4K content, with a three-hour battery.

That device is set to land in Australia for around $2000 later this year.

Smart cars

Another clear theme from the show was the shift to automotive tech. Just about every major technology company had something to show or say about the car space.

Over at Samsung it was a partnership with Hyundai and Kia to integrate its SmartThings app into their infotainment systems.

This gives drivers the ability to control smart devices from the car – or, from the home, the ability to start a car, wind a window down or set the temperature.

The company's subsidiary Harmanis working on developing sensor technology and computer vision in vehicles, which could detect when a driver was drowsy and make attempts to wake them up or stop their vehicle safely.

Sony's show-stopping device was an electric vehicle co-developed with Honda, which they plan to sell in the US in 2026.

The car, named Afeela-EV, stole the show momentarily when Sony drove it onto a stage using a PlayStation 5 controller.

LG displayed technology that uses artificial intelligence to scan people. It can determine what glasses a person was wearing, how much they cost and where they could be bought, explained the company's Australian marketing director Gemma Lemieux.

Pet care turns robotic

Pet care has also reached new heights. According to some exhibitors, robots can care for and entertain pets.

Ogmen Robotics has developed ORo, a robot that can provide "mood enhancement" by "monitoring when your dog is sad or anxious".

"ORo's adaptive smart learning capabilities enable it to intuitively understand and respond to your dog's behaviours, ensuring personalised care that improves over time," the start-up says.

A new robot by the name of Ballie has similar functions but can also take on the dog's role of house patrol, using AI to determine whether windows and doors were open.

Ballie could do a little more with the use of AI and SmartThings connectivity. It's able to turn off app-controlled devices, play music and read out messages, emails and appointments, according to Samsung, its manufacturer.

The showstopper feature for that particular robot was the ability to project a screen on the ceiling to show Netflix or display animals on the ground to keep the dog amused.

LG was promoting robots. It said its AI Agent could read and anticipate a homeowner's mood with the help of AI and suggest content that could improve that.

Sensory social media

An Israeli start-up wants to bring social media one step closer to reality. It's developing a device that allows people to send a scent along with a text.

Called iRomaScents, it's about the size of two meat pies sitting on top of each other.

When a person receives a text, the device will produce the scent when they press play.

Meet and greet

For some it wasn't all about putting on a show, but using the time to meet international partners. That was the case for Jason Carrington, the founder of Cygnett, who brought a team of three over – and a handful of new products to show privately in hotel rooms and meeting spaces. That product line included a new credit card-shaped tracking device that works with Apple's FindMy technology, which is used to track its AirTags.

The Cygnett device is slim enough to fit in a wallet, can be charged with a wireless charger and has a battery life of up to three months. The company also offers new travel chargers with different adaptors and a new 240W USB-C cable which is designed to allow high-speed data transfer, supporting up to 8K and intended to replace HDMI cables.

Mr Carrington said one of the big changes to come in 2024 in the charging space was the arrival of the Qi2 protocol that allowed MagSafe wireless chargers to reach up to 15W. "I think the real benefit of being here is having all of our international partners in the one place. We're seeing a lot of growth in the travel market so we're increasingly moving into that space," he said.

Joseph Lam was a guest of Samsung in Las Vegas.

Domestic tourism on the mend from ills of Covid era

MATT BELL

Australians have travelled across the country in their highest numbers since the pandemic, despite wild weather affecting popular destinations in Queensland, tourism operators say.

But the industry says inbound international tourism is not meeting expectations, because a lack of airline capacity, exacerbated by Australians prioritising overseas travel in the wake of the pandemic, was acting as a roadblock.

Flight Centre data shows domestic travel bookings increased by 2 per cent from the previous year, and the Gold Coast, Ballina-Byron and Tasmania were the most popular destinations, while demand for Western Australia, Uluru and Alice Springs also surged.

The operator of Discovery Parks and G'Day Parks, G'day Group said bookings in WA were up 20 per cent from the previous year, and South Australia also did well as it saw more budget-conscious holiday-makers.

Popular destinations in Queensland, however, were affected by wild weather. Cyclone Jasper caused damage across Far North Queensland and the temporary closure of Cairns Airport, which peak body Accommodation Australia said caused occupancy rates to drop from mid 70 per cent to 30 per cent over December.

MAX MASON-HUBERS

Queuing for check-in at Jetstar at Sydney domestic airport

On the Gold Coast, wild thunderstorms caused widespread power outages and damage forced the region's theme parks to close for several days.

Flight Centre chief executive Graham Turner said that the small spike in domestic tourism was dwarfed by a 15 per cent bounce in international booking over the Christmas period.

"People are still catching up from the Covid era where they couldn't fly and are prioritising international trips," Mr Turner said.

"It is hard to know whether this will continue but forward bookings for overseas are very strong for the northern hemisphere summer."

Tourism Research Australia forecasts that international tourists won't surpass pre-pandemic levels until 2025 and the recovery was only two-thirds complete. Meanwhile, the Australian Bureau of Statistics reported that the number of Australians returning from an overseas holiday was only down 7 per cent from pre-pandemic levels.

Mr Turner said that the popularity of outbound travel was affecting the volume of international tourists who could enter Australia and that limited capacity and higher airfares was making the country expensive to visit.

"There is still a long way to go to get back to pre-pandemic levels for inbound tourism and how long will depend on capacity, with the big volume of Aussies travelling taking up much of the available seats," he said.

"The limited capacity will reduce the number of tourists that come, but we are seeing more seats made available each month."

The federal and Queensland governments are hoping to draw tourists back to far north Queensland with a $5m fund to support local operators and to offer discounted airfares to the region.

Accommodation Australia chief executive Michael Johnson said all tourism operators were operating daily on the Great Barrier Reef thanks to discounted airfares and accommodation, after the region was hit with extensive cancellations in December resulting in millions of dollars in lost revenue.

"Far North Queensland has taken a blow in recent years with the pandemic and destructive weather events, but Cairns and the surrounding areas are ready to welcome back tourists and this package is great news for the area," he said.

Australian Federation of Travel Agents chief executive Dean Long said floods and rain that hit Queensland resorted in cancellations from travellers, who he observed had opted against rebooking to another destination.

"It was interesting that we did not see those funds get deployed elsewhere, but north Queensland is a particular destination with activities that are ... unique in Australia," he said.

"If there are disruptions elsewhere, you generally swap one beach destination for another, but it is pretty hard to find another Great Barrier Reef so we are hoping that means people will look to return to the region at Easter."

G'day Group chief executive Grant Wilckens said the summer holiday period had met expectations, but weather had dampened demand in parts of the country.

"Overall we are pretty happy with how summer has gone. We've hit our targets for December and will do so January, and we are currently tracking up 10 per cent from pre-Covid levels," he said.

"Weather does impact all tourism businesses, so when we have a good hot summer then generally operators will do well, but our parks in locations that have seen lots of rain have, however, been impacted."

He said more budget conscious holiday-makers were prepared to trade down from a resort to a holiday park amid higher living expenses caused by soaring power bills, grocery prices, rents and mortgage costs.

TCorp braces for rising volatility

Continued from Page 13

believed "the back of inflation has been broken" as supply constraints after the pandemic had been cleared.

The energy transition and the continuing onshoring trend, however, would keep inflation higher.

Mr Brentnall also said equity markets were "probably not discounting any significant geopolitics problems" but "the Russia-Ukraine war could go on for years, Middle East tensions could escalate".

Therefore, the 70-strong team of investment professionals Mr Brentnall leads did not have "such a constructive view on equities", he said.

"We believe the appropriate position to take is a more diversified portfolio that provides resilience against a number of different environments rather than trying to predict a one-off to get right but equally quite possibly get it wrong." He said the fund's strategy had recently changed, with a de-allocation to developed markets equity alpha (or skill-based non-market bets) and higher allocations to alphas from investment managers focused on Australian equities, alternative and credit markets.

The fund is also looking at other "idiosyncratic or other forms of alpha" including potential investments in late-stage private equity managers.

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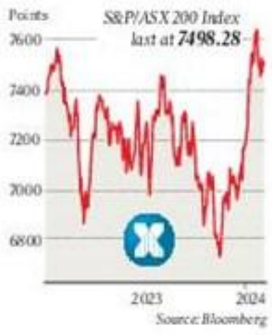
Hopes for ASX with all eyes on Red Sea

MATT BELL



The local share market was poised to open flat on Monday, ahead of closely watched labour force figures due later this week and amid ongoing geopolitical risks in the Middle East.

Futures markets were tipping the benchmark S&P/ASX 200 index to open up 5 points at 7470 on Monday after it gained 0.1 per cent last week.

Wall Street stocks were flat on Friday night as major banks reported quarterly results, and traders raised bets that the Federal Reserve will cut interest rates from as soon as March. It came before the US indices prepared to close on Monday for Martin Luther King Day.

The latest catalyst for a pivot in the outlook for interest rates followed December's producer price index report, which showed an unexpected decline in prices amid falls for goods such as diesel and food.

Markets are also watching the escalation of hostilities in the Red Sea after the US and the UK launched retaliatory hits on Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen after attacks on ships.

Oil prices climbed 4 per cent on Friday to near $US81 per barrel after US and British forces launched strikes, before giving up most of the gains to be near $US78.52.

"The fear in the oil market is that the region is on an unpredictable escalating path, where at some point down the road, supply of oil will indeed in the end be lost," noted Bjarne Schieldrop, chief commodities analyst at SEB bank.

He noted that if the US-British attacks were unsuccessful in destroying Houthi weapons, and oil tankers needed to go around Africa, then up to 80 million barrels would be locked in transit — sending prices up as much as $US10 per barrel.

The Houthis have carried out a growing number of strikes on vessels in the Red Sea, a key international shipping route, since Hamas attacked Israel in October. The attacks have affected trade flows at a time when supply strains are putting upward pressure on inflation globally.

AMP chief economist Shane Oliver said that amid geopolitical risks, the bourse remained vulnerable to a short-term correction over the coming week after a strong, sharp rally since November.

"Shares went up too far, too fast late last year," he said.

"The extent of the rally has left shares overextended and vulnerable to a pullback as central banks may not start to cut rates as early as markets are assuming, the risk of recession remains high and the creeping widening in the Israel/Hamas conflict poses a risk to global growth and inflation."

Locally, in the week ahead the spotlight will be on labour data for December.

Markets expect the unemployment rate to be unchanged at 3.9 per cent and the number of jobs created to slow from 61,500 in November to 18,000.

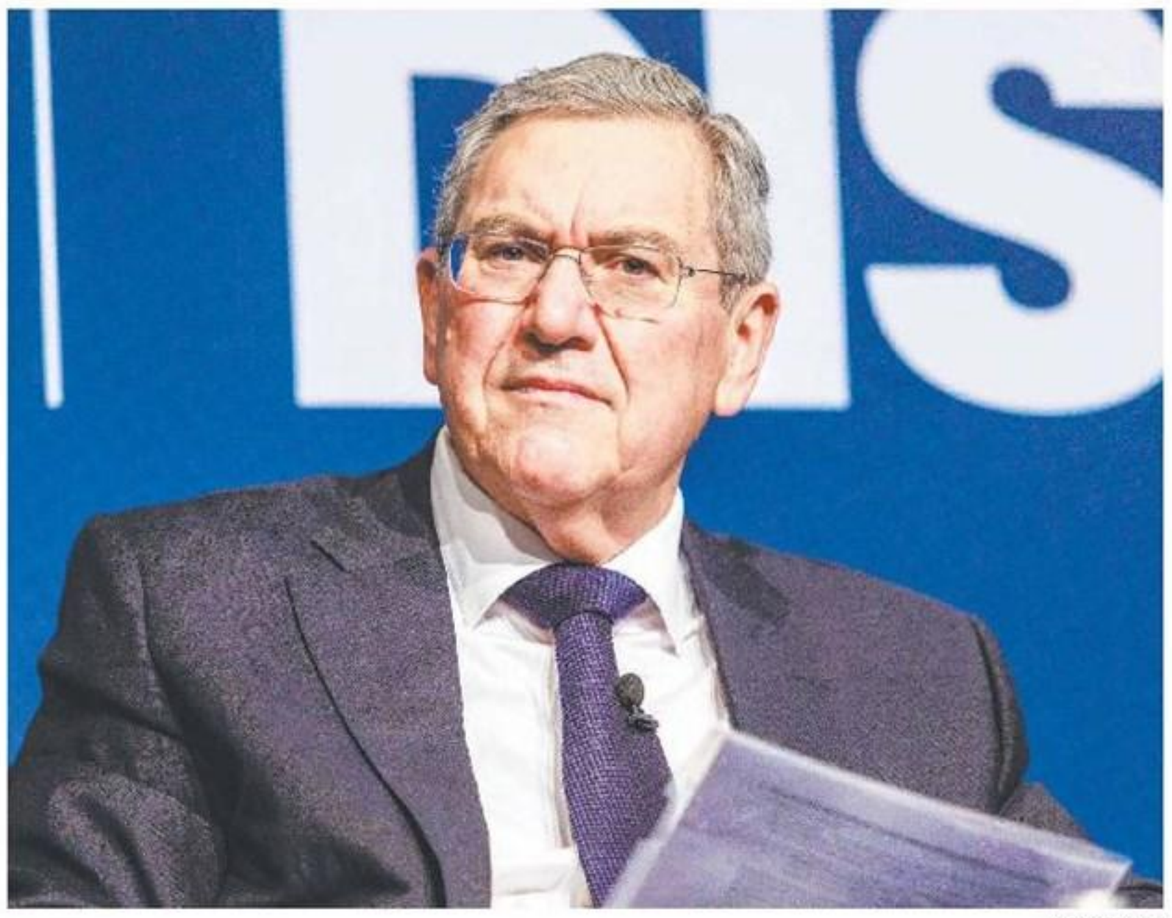
The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 0.3 per cent to 37,592.98, the S&P 500 firmed 0.1 per cent to 4,783.83 and the tech-rich Nasdaq Composite Index was unchanged at 14,972.76.

The dollar retreated in the past week to be US66.9c on Sunday.

ADDITIONAL REPORTING: AFP

ASIC turns heat up on greenwashing

DAVID ROSS



AARON FRANCIS

ASIC chair Joe Longo says it's never acceptable to mislead and deceive

Australia's chief regulator wants to be feared by the financial services sector, as the anti-greenwashing push heats up amid a move to mandatory disclosures from corporate Australia.

But industry figures have warned the Australian Securities and Investments Commission's greenwashing offensive risks taking with it the burgeoning ESG-focused funds management world and crimping the impetus of investment swinging away from coal and gas and towards clean and green assets.

Speaking late last year, on the sidelines of the ASIC annual forum, chair Joe Longo noted he did not shy away from accusations the regulator's actions were having a chilling effect.

Mr Longo said he made "no apology" about the regulator's greenwashing enforcement efforts, which have seen ASIC pursue financial giants, including Mercer and Vanguard, in the last year over claims made in documents to investors.

Greenwashing is the overstating of environmental or ESG credentials, claiming a product is cleaner than reality, or investments avoid coal and gas products when in fact they are there.

"There's no doubt that greenwashing is a very harmful activity," Mr Longo said.

Mr Longo said criticism of ASIC's enforcement record around greenwashing needed to be "specific".

"Now remember what problem it is we're trying to solve for. It's just never been acceptable. Never been acceptable, either this year or 25 years ago, in trade or commerce, in distributing products, goods and services, to mislead and deceive," he said.

"If people say to me, 'Oh, well, you know, it all makes it really difficult for us to run our business because it has a chilling effect.' Well, you know what, I intend to have a chilling effect over activity that is misleading and deceptive. I make no apology."

In addition to ASIC's pursuit of companies over greenwashing, the competition regulator is also cracking down on companies it sees as engaging in overly enthusiastic claims of environmental credentials.

Both ASIC and the ACCC have run hot on greenwashing enforcement in the last year, with both again listing the issue as a priority for the year ahead.

In March the ACCC ran a sweep of more than 200 company websites, warning almost 57 per cent made claims about environmental or sustainability practices that risked running afoul of the regulator.

It may all be having the desired outcome, with a report from the Responsible Investment Association of Australia recently pointing to a 16 per cent slide in the size of the domestic responsible investment market to $1.3 trillion at the end of 2022.

The report noted there had been "tightening definitions of responsible investment by some large international investment managers" in response.

ASIC has taken aim at Mercer and Vanguard, among other superannuation funds, over their environmental claims.

This comes as activist groups, including Market Forces, take aim at super funds over their investments in a bid to push the managers of retirement wealth to walk away from owning oil, gas, and coal projects.

ASIC, under Mr Longo, has even forced its greenwashing fight on former commissioner Sean Hughes, who moved to Vanguard as the financial company's general counsel in Australia.

But Mr Longo said the sector should see ASIC's greenwashing enforcement as "the least of their problems".

"So, from my personal point of view as ASIC, what's my job? To get good results for members? What's a superannuation fund? Is it good results for members? So they shouldn't be worrying about greenwashing. They should be obeying the law," he said.

> 'Greenwashing is a very harmful activity'
>
> JOE LONGO
> ASIC CHAIR

A review before Treasury may play a key role in how greenwashing issues play out in the coming years, with the department noting it was aiming to "assist regulators address greenwashing", which could see Australia develop or adapt a labelling system for investment products along the lines rolled out in the United Kingdom.

"This lack of clarity and the limited ways to verify that investments are true to label can contribute to greenwashing, erode credibility in the sustainable finance market and ultimately result in a misallocation of capital," Treasury's report notes.

Financial Services Council chief executive Blake Briggs said industry, superannuation funds, and fund managers "share the government and regulator's goal of ensuring sustainable investment options are true to label".

But Mr Briggs pointed to the "reduction in sustainable investment product launches between 2021 to 2022" as a sign not all was well with "the ability of the financial services industry to support the climate transition and other sustainability goals".

"As the sustainable fund market in Australia remains relatively small when compared with Europe and the United States, it is important we get the regulatory settings right if the government's aim of greater sustainable finance flows is to be met," he said.

Late last week the government introduced draft legislation, which will make climate disclosures mandatory progressively over the coming years.

Baker McKenzie dispute resolution group partner Amy Middlebrook said there were many moving parts around greenwashing, as governments examine disclosures and market guidance.

"Everyone's in this grace period, it's all coming soon and it's going to come to a head," she said.

She said the difficulty around greenwashing often manifested in marketing, where companies sought to make claims without running afoul of regulators.

Ms Middlebrook said companies coming to Baker McKenzie for legal advice wanted to "get it right", but noted she wasn't seeing "greenhushing", as companies pulled marketing amid fear of regulatory attention.

But Ashurst APAC competition practice head Alyssa Phillips said she was increasingly seeing incidents of greenhushing, as companies pulled back from making claims about products amid uncertainty around disclosures.

"We're recommending clients review everything from sustainability reports and all the way down to their blog posts," she said.

Both corporate lawyers agree certainty can't come soon enough.

Cyber breaches under scrutiny

ANGELICA SNOWDEN

The role of directors and how effectively companies manage fallout from breaches is being eyed by the corporate watchdog as it considers its task in enforcing and regulating cyber security, while it also works to understand how banks and insurers are using artificial intelligence.

While cyber is not a 2024 enforcement priority, Australian Securities and Investments Commission deputy chairwoman Sarah Court told The Australian it remains a focus area – particularly through the lens of directors' duties.

"Given the nature of the information a company may hold about people, we will look at whether the company should have been doing more to protect that information," she said.

"Once a breach has occurred, we will also look at the response: How has the company dealt with people that are affected how quickly have the communications got out, how quickly has it reacted to shut its system down."

The regulator will examine what role a company's leadership played during and following of a cyber attack, Ms Court said.

"We are interested in the governance and the duties of directors and senior executives. Does the conduct or the failure to respond in a way that people expect constitute a breach of the directors' duties," she said.

It comes in the wake of a number high-profile Australian cyber breaches that have led to sensitive consumer information being released online.

In 2022, Australia's second biggest telco Optus was hacked and personal data belonging to up to 10 million customers – including passport numbers, birth dates, names and addresses – was leaked.

That was followed by a major network outage last year, when the company failed to hold a press conference on the day of the outage or provide more regular updates. The two crises led former chief executive Kelly Bayer Rosmarin to resign.

Court

As well, private health insurer Medibank was hacked in 2022 and sensitive information of about nine million Australians was stolen. After the attack, Russian hackers published details including mental health data to the dark web.

ASIC conducted an inaugural, voluntary self-assessment of corporate Australia's cyber resilience and last year released a report that "exposed deficiencies in cyber security risk management" practices, and found companies were reactive to attacks rather than proactive.

The results showed 44 per cent of participants did not manage third-party or supply chain risk and 58 per cent of participants said they had limited or no capability to protect information adequately.

On artificial intelligence, Ms Court said after the technology rapidly expanded in the past 12 months, ASIC was taking a "very keen interest" in trying to understand the role and impact of AI across the economy.

"From our perspective, we're looking at how is AI being used by the sector we are regulating. By banks or by insurers, is it being used in a fair way? Can the companies explain how it is being used," she said.

"Let's say you've got an insurance claim that's being denied using AI. We want to know who is responsible for that.

"What factors have been taken into account and the point that we've been making is that the company has to be able to explain how AI is being used and how results are eventuating."

Further, Ms Court said the regulator needs to ensure companies cannot absolve themselves of liability for unlawful conduct "by saying, 'Oh, well, it wasn't us. It was this machine...

"So the governance around AI and how it's used in relation to consumers in particular, again, is something we're taking a very keen interest in."

Ellis rejects doubts about RBA policy board

Continued from Page 13

establishment of a new board will provide the Albanese government with the opportunity to start with a clean slate of new members appointed by the Treasurer in one fell swoop.

Ms Ellis, whose role as assistant governor (economic) saw her brief the RBA board each month from December 2016 to the middle of 2023, when she left, said the federal treasurer had always appointed the members of the Reserve Bank.

"It always been possible to 'stack a board with your mates' but the actual practice has been that that has n't been happening," he said.

"The board that I worked with was extremely engaged, asked really good questions and were accustomed to making decisions under uncertainty.

"If you look at the most recent appointments, they have those characteristics as well.

"There is the same commitment to the public good and (people with) the same long history of making decisions under uncertainty and interest in economic issues.

"It is always possible for (the recommendations of the review) to turn out in the way that Ian Macfarlane fears, but as a practical outcome, I don't think it will."

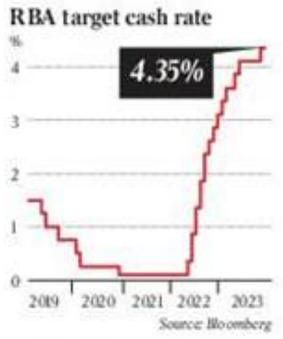
Ms Ellis rejected suggestions that the new members could be tempted to adopt an easy stance on monetary policy to pump up the economy ahead of the 2025 election.

"I don't think either side of politics wants to have an inappropriate set of board appointments," she said.

"They want to have wise policy-making members who can ask good questions and probe the staff and see the bigger picture.

"The kind of people who are being appointed to the RBA board, and have been appointed in the past, see the bigger picture."

RBA target cash rate



She said she expected that any one being appointed to the new board would be "well aware that the RBA is there to do a job, which is to fulfil its mandate of aiming inflation towards the target range and sustaining full employment.

"There's no real benefit to shading those objectives with short-term politics. People will see through that instantly."

In an interview with The Australian's Editor-at-Large, Paul Kelly, last September, Mr Macfarlane said the proposed structure of the new board would put the governor in a "weak" position not imposed on any other central bank governor around the world.

He said the existing RBA board was in effect an advisory board for the bank, while the new monetary policy-setting board, with six new outsiders as members, would be one which "proactively shapes policy decisions."

"These two features are incompatible," she said. "The result will be a board structure unlike any other central bank.

"We are being asked to entrust two-thirds of the voting power on monetary policy to a group of people we don't know anything about," Mr Macfarlane said.

"They are referred to (in the review) as experts, but experts in what?

"The RBA is being asked to outsource its core competence – monetary policy – to a group of unknown competence."

Half of us struggling, but super is our lifeboat

MEGAN NEIL

Just over half of Australians are struggling financially but most view superannuation as "a lifeboat" for their future finances, according to super industry-commissioned research.

An Essential Research survey conducted for the Super Members Council found that 53 per cent of people are experiencing some degree of financial difficulty.

Essential Research said the proportion of people under financial pressure was consistently high throughout 2023, and was up from 39 per cent in mid-2022.

A third of people felt financially secure and usually had spare money for savings or buying luxuries, and another 13 per cent described their position as comfortable, without concerns about paying bills.

The biggest group, representing 39 per cent of survey respondents, said they were "struggling a bit" and were having to watch their budgets to ensure there was enough money to cover all their bills.

Another 14 per cent described themselves as being in serious difficulty, and being able to pay all their bills was a regular concern.

Super Members Council executive general manager of advocacy Georgia Brumby said while cost-of-living pressures were hitting family budgets, superannuation gave them a feeling of certainty and future financial security.

"More Australians are feeling the economic pinch right now, but super is seen as a lifeboat through today's economic turbulent waters," Ms Brumby said.

The survey showed 58 per cent of people agreed superannuation helped them feel more confident about their financial wellbeing.

Among those experiencing financial difficulty, 54 per cent said super gave them confidence about their financial wellbeing.

Overall, 55 per cent of respondents who had superannuation agreed that super was a low-cost way to build savings.

The same number believed super funds had performed strongly over the long term, while just under a third had a neutral response to that question.

Research house Chant West predicted the median growth super fund would return 8.8 per cent for 2023, helped by a share-market rally fuelled by tech stocks and expectations of lower rates.

The Super Members Council, a lobby and policy body set up last year to represent the profit-to-member superannuation sector, is calling for stability in super policy this year.

"The Super Members Council wants the super system to work in the interests of all Australians to deliver the very best outcomes in retirement," Ms Brumby said.

"This means ensuring super policy remains stable, effective and equitable, while safeguarding its foundations of preservation, universality and compulsion."

Industry leaders expect super funds will come under increasing pressure this year to develop policies to cater for millions moving into retirement, The Australian's 2024 CEO survey revealed.

NOTICES

www.theaustralian.com.au

Notification for Publication of Preliminary Documentation under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act)
Coonara Residential Development at 55 Coonara Avenue, West Pennant Hills, NSW
(EPBC 2023/09508)

Invitation for Public Comment

Mirvac Projects Pty Ltd proposes to develop parts of the property located at 55 Coonara Avenue, West Pennant Hills, NSW, including demolition of existing buildings, removal and modification of existing infrastructure, construction of up to 165 community-titled dwellings and up to 252 apartments, communal facilities, and open space.

This proposal has been determined a 'controlled action' pursuant to section 75 of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). The controlling provision under Part 3 of the EPBC Act is 'Listed threatened species and ecological communities' (sections 18 and 18A).

The Commonwealth Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) has advised that the proposal will be assessed by Preliminary Documentation. This notice is published in accordance with Section 95A(3) of the EPBC Act.

The Preliminary Documentation is on display during regular business hours between 15 January and 5 February, 15 business days, at the following locations:

- The Hills Shire Council, Administration Centre, 3 Columbia Court Norwest NSW 2153
- The State Library of NSW, LG2, 1 Shakespeare Place, Sydney NSW 2000

The Preliminary Documentation can also be viewed and downloaded online at Coonara Community Website: https://coonaracommunity.mirvac.com/exhibition-documents.

Interested persons and organisations are invited to submit comments. All comments on the Preliminary Documentation must be in writing and received by 5.00 pm on **5 February 2024**, using the online submission form, by email to coonaracommunity@mirvac.com or by mail to Josie Leeson, Mirvac, Level 28, 200 George Street, Sydney NSW 2000.

Persons with special needs may contact Mirvac by email coonaracommunity@mirvac.com or phone 1800 531 535 for assistance accessing the material.

Out of fashion: Shein mega-IPO must navigate US-China political maze

SHEN LU
CORRIE DRIEBUSCH

The initial public offering of fashion giant Shein could be one of biggest in years – if the company successfully navigates a minefield of US-China tensions.

China-founded Shein, now based in Singapore, has quickly become one of the world's largest fast-fashion retailers, valued at $US66bn ($98.7bn) in its most recent fundraising round last year.

Now its IPO depends on its ability to satisfy authorities on both sides of the Pacific.

Two months after Shein confidentially filed for an IPO, the Securities and Exchange Commission has yet to respond in writing to its filing, according to people familiar with the matter. The delay is highly unusual, capital-market attorneys and bankers say.

The reasons for the SEC's silence aren't clear. People close to the company and in Washington say it could reflect the agency's reluctance to take on a hot-button issue with potential political implications.

According to SEC's guidelines for confidential IPO filing by foreign companies, "circumstances may develop" in which SEC staff direct foreign issuers to publicly file a registration statement even though they would appear to be eligible for confidential treatment.

Companies typically bristle at public filings. Filing confidentially allows companies to keep sensitive business and financial data away from public eyes during discussions with regulators, and those stay private if a deal doesn't ultimately go through.

Shein has taken steps over the years to distance itself from its Chinese roots, including moving its headquarters to Singapore. It sells its wares in more than 150 countries but doesn't have customers in China. But with the bulk of its supply chain and back offices in China, it is still necessary for Shein to secure Beijing's blessing on its US listing, lawyers, bankers and analysts say.

> Shein has taken steps to distance itself from its Chinese roots, including moving to Singapore

The company has filed the paperwork for its US application with the China Securities Regulatory Commission and is in continuing discussions with the regulator, according to people familiar with the matter.

Shein's conundrum shows how US-China tensions increasingly pose challenges beyond conventional business practices for multinationals. Its application represents the first big test of how Washington and Beijing will view a US listing of a high-profile company with roots in China since the ill-fated IPO by ride-hailing giant Didi Global in 2021.

Didi decided to go ahead with its listing despite suggestions from Chinese authorities to delay it, The Wall Street Journal reported. Chinese authorities promptly launched a probe into Didi's data infrastructure, ordered it to stop registering new users and forced some of its popular apps to be taken down. Valued at $US68.4bn the day of its debut, Didi's shares plummeted and the company delisted from the New York Stock Exchange in less than a year.

In March, the China Securities Regulatory Commission rolled out new guidelines that require Chinese companies planning to go public outside mainland China to submit their listing documents to the regulator and obtain its formal approval. The guidelines lay out a number of factors to determine what should be considered a Chinese company, including whether a company has more than half of its assets or most of its business activities in the mainland.

Shein is incorporated in Singapore and doesn't have any revenue from China. It relies mostly on third-party contractors there for production. But Beijing may nonetheless treat it as a Chinese company and add complications for Shein if the company is perceived to go against Beijing's agenda, including ordering domestic manufacturers to stop working with the company.

"The balancing act of operating supply chains in one country while generating sales in another is becoming an increasingly complex challenge, potentially presenting difficulties on both fronts," said Jing Qian, managing director of the Asia Society's Center for China Analysis. "Navigating and resolving these multifaceted complexities is crucial for their continued survival."

Part of Shein's predicament is how to address concerns over the cotton it uses in its clothing.

Shein has in recent years been accused of sourcing cotton from China's Xinjiang region. A 2022 US law largely bans the import of goods tied to that region, where the US has accused Chinese authorities of genocide and using forced labour in its repression of mostly Muslim Uyghurs. Beijing has denied the allegations.

The company has said it has "zero tolerance" for forced labour and complies with laws in the markets where it operates.

Still, some US politicians see Shein as a company with close ties to the Communist Party that has potentially violated US law. They have urged the SEC to halt Shein's IPO until the company shows sufficient transparency about its supply chain. A congressional committee is investigating Shein's labour practices.

Companies viewed in China as bowing to Western criticism of Beijing's practices in Xinjiang have faced swift retaliation. H&M was wiped from China's mobile apps after it said it would stop sourcing products from Xinjiang.

ADDITIONAL REPORTING: REBECCA FENG, PAUL KIERNAN

BlackRock to buy GIP in $18.7bn takeover

JACK PITCHER

BlackRock has agreed to buy private equity firm Global Infrastructure Partners for roughly $US12.5bn ($18.7bn) in cash and stock, a significant push into private market investments for the world's largest asset manager.

New York-based GIP owns and operates energy, transportation, and water and waste companies, including a stake in London's Gatwick Airport. The acquisition would be BlackRock's largest since it bought Barclays's asset management business in 2009.

BlackRock separately reported its assets under management topped $US10 trillion at the end of the fourth quarter for just the second time in its history.

To acquire GIP, BlackRock will pay $US3bn in cash and 12 million of its own shares, worth about $US9.5bn, based on Thursday's closing price. GIP is majority-owned by its six founding partners, who will collectively become among the largest shareholders of BlackRock by acquiring about 8 per cent of the shares outstanding, according to a person familiar with the deal.

> 'Infrastructure is one of the most exciting long-term opportunities'
>
> LARRY FINK
> BLACKROCK CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Five of the six founding partners, including chief executive Bayo Ogunlesi, are joining BlackRock. Mr Ogunlesi will sit on BlackRock's board and resign as lead director of Goldman Sachs. He will lead BlackRock's new infrastructure group.

"Infrastructure is one of the most exciting long-term investment opportunities, as a number of structural shifts reshape the global economy," BlackRock chief executive Larry Fink said.

"Policymakers are only just beginning to implement once-in-a-generation financial incentives for new infrastructure technologies and projects."

BlackRock has been pushing to expand its private market operations, an area that is faster growing and potentially more lucrative than its core business of selling low-cost passive investment products such as exchange-traded funds. The deal will boost BlackRock's private assets by about 30 per cent and roughly double its private-market base management fees.

In GIP, BlackRock is buying an infrastructure fund manager with about $US100bn under management and $US80bn of combined revenue from its portfolio companies.

The deal is expected to close in the second or third quarter, after which BlackRock will create a distinct Global Infrastructure Partners business that combines the acquired firm with existing BlackRock infrastructure teams.

BlackRock says the new business will be the second-largest private infrastructure manager globally with more than $US150bn in assets under management, trailing only Brookfield Asset Management.

Growing government deficits are increasing the need for private financing of major infrastructure projects, and subsidies can make the investments attractive, BlackRock chief financial officer Martin Small said.

BlackRock favoured acquiring GIP over a more-traditional private equity buyout firm in part due to the belief that private equity's best returns from the zero-interest rate era were behind it, Mr Small said.

For GIP, coming under the BlackRock umbrella should enhance scale and access to boardrooms and governments, said Raj Rao, president of GIP.

In a memo to employees, BlackRock concurrently announced a reorganisation it called its "biggest transformation in 15 years". BlackRock will create a new global product services business that works across all of the firm's investment strategies and fund structures, including the mammoth iShares ETF business. The division will aim to connect clients with all of BlackRock's offerings, including public and private investments, and help "drive the next phase of growth".

Luxury hand-me-downs now worth billions

A Birkin 25 bag costs roughly $US10,000 at one of Hermes' US boutiques but can fetch $US24,000 or more from major resale dealers

HEARD ON THE STREET

CAROL RYAN

As much as luxury companies would love to stamp out the second-hand trade in their products, it's an impossible task. All the better for fashionistas and investors, who can both benefit from this booming business.

Shoppers have splashed out $US1.3 trillion ($1.94 trillion) on new luxury handbags, clothes, watches and jewels over the past four years alone. At least some of that stuff will find its way onto second-hand websites. While in the past, unworn luxury goods would gather dust at the back of consumers' wardrobes, the rise of online luxury resellers like The RealReal and Vestiaire Collective has made it easy for millions of people to sell their designer goods for cash.

Second-hand luxury products worth €45bn, or $US49.3bn at current exchange rates, were sold worldwide in 2023, based on Bain & Company estimates. The resale market has roughly doubled in size in four years and is now equivalent to 12 per cent of the value of the market for new personal luxury goods. That is big enough for designers to sit up and take notice. Brands have legitimate worries that fakes may be passed off as the real thing on second-hand websites, some of which don't have stringent authentication checks. But they also dislike how easy it has become for consumers to see which goods keep their value and which ones don't.

"I think brands are watching their resale value very closely," says Sasha Skoda, The RealReal's senior director of merchandising. "They are curious to figure out how they can get more data around it."

For a handful of luxury companies, resale values are flattering as buyers pay up to avoid waiting lists. On average, used Hermes handbags are 25 per cent more expensive than new ones, and scarce designs get an even higher premium. A basic Birkin 25 bag, which costs roughly $US10,000 to buy new in one of Hermes' US boutiques, will set shoppers back $US24,000 or more from major resale dealers like Prive Porter. Similarly, used watches made by Rolex and Patek Philippe sell at average premiums of 20 per cent and 39 per cent, respectively, based on data from WatchCharts.

But most labels show wear and tear at resale. Handbags made by Louis Vuitton lose 40 per cent of their value on average when they are resold, according to data from The RealReal. Christian Dior's bags almost halve in value.

Some investors are buying detailed data from the likes of WatchCharts to get clues about which stocks to purchase or avoid. For example, although Rolex, Patek Philippe and Audemars Piguet are all privately owned businesses, strong resale values are usually a good omen for Watches of Switzerland. The UK-listed luxury watch retailer gets 60 per cent of its revenue from sales of the three coveted brands.

> 'I think brands are watching their resale value very closely'
>
> SASHA SKODA
> THE REALREAL

Resale data also provides early clues about whether or not brand makeovers are working. The second-hand value of goods from Italian luxury label Salvatore Ferragamo, which is in the middle of a revamp, has jumped on The RealReal over the past year. In contrast, Burberry's average resale value has fallen 17 per cent. This isn't a good sign for the brand, which in late 2022 hired new creative director Daniel Lee to improve lacklustre sales.

The top brands of Paris-listed luxury group Kering also look weak. It owns Gucci, Balenciaga and Bottega Veneta, whose used values have slipped 10 per cent, 14 per cent and 23 per cent respectively over the past year.

The data can also reveal whether aggressive price increases, meant to make brands seem more desirable and exclusive, are having the intended effect. In the case of Chanel, the answer seems to be no. The privately owned French brand hiked the price of its popular medium-size Classic Flap bag by more than 70 per cent during the pandemic. The bag's second-hand price hasn't kept up, widening the second-hand discount, though it is still narrower than for most peers.

While this kind of information can be valuable to investors, owning resale stocks themselves hasn't paid off. Shares in The RealReal have fallen more than 90 per cent since the company's initial public offering in 2019.

For luxury companies, one question posed by the data is whether they can influence their resale values by intervening directly in the second-hand market. So far, this isn't happening much. Gucci, Stella McCartney and Burberry all dipped their toes into it through partnerships with resale websites, but the moves proved minor or temporary.

Rolex is an exception. In late 2022, the Swiss watchmaker launched a certified pre-owned watch program that is turning out to be a savvy business move. Early signs are that shoppers are willing to pay extra for used watches that have been verified by Rolex.

A Rolex 126500 Daytona timepiece costs $US15,100 to buy new. As the model is scarce, an unauthorised dealer can sell a used one for $US32,300 according to WatchCharts estimates. However, a used Daytona sold through the Rolex certified initiative can fetch $US37,000 or more.

Big wind project raises $16.5bn

SCOTT PATTERSON

A wind and power transmission project, called the largest of its kind in the country, has raised $US11bn ($16.5bn) in financing, kicking off a year when many utilities are expected to step up much-needed spending on the power grid.

Pattern Energy has started construction on its SunZia project, a wind farm in central New Mexico, where more than 900 wind turbines will generate over 3000 megawatts of clean energy. An 885km transmission line will bring the power to some three million people in Arizona and California.

The project has been in the works since 2006, when Taylor Swift released her debut album. It was "fast-tracked" in 2011 by the Obama administration.

Such a sluggish timeline could threaten President Biden's ambition to reach 100 per cent clean electricity by 2035. A Princeton University study found that if the US continues to expand transmission at the 1 per cent pace of the previous 10 years, that would result in more coal and natural-gas consumption than if Biden's Inflation Reduction Act hadn't passed. That is because the law creates incentives for more power consumption by electric vehicles and other clean-energy devices.

John Podesta, White House clean-energy adviser, said at an Energy Department conference last year that the country needed to dramatically accelerate work on transmission to reach the administration's clean-energy goals. "We need to deploy transmission lines at twice the current pace than we've experienced in the last couple years," he said.

Spurred in part by federal clean-energy incentives, a manufacturing renaissance and growth in data centres, electricity demand is surging. Demand is expected to grow by a cumulative 4.7 per cent over the next five years, an increase from forecasts of 2.6 per cent growth over that period made the previous year, according to Grid Strategies, a power-sector consulting firm.

The grid isn't ready for that surge in demand, and current processes for expanding the grid aren't either, experts said. State and federal red tape often delay large-scale infrastructure projects for years. The average federal environmental review takes 4½ years, according to a 2020 White House report.

Despite widespread agreement in Washington that the permitting system for infrastructure projects is flawed, politicians have repeatedly failed to reach an agreement to streamline it.

The Energy Department is deploying billions of dollars to improve and expand transmission. In September it announced grants to tribes, territories and 11 states as part of a $US2.3bn program designed to strengthen the grid and make it more resilient to outages and extreme weather. The department's Grid Deployment Office manages about $US25bn from the 2021 infrastructure legislation and the Inflation Reduction Act, according to department officials.

The DOE funds, while helpful, are a drop in the bucket when it comes to the trillions of dollars it will take to upgrade and expand the grid.

More cheese, please: farmers squeeze cows for fattier milk as demand grows

KIRK MALTAIS

Americans are eating more cheese and butter. That has dairy farmers scrambling to get their cows to produce fattier milk.

The efforts include using different cow breeds and feed mixes, and making sure animals are comfortable and don't get too hot. The result is that the average amount of butterfat in milk produced by US dairy herds has climbed past 4 per cent and above the previous record set during World War II.

Just five years ago, dairy farmer Melvin Medeiros said his herd consisted entirely of Holsteins, the black-and-white spotted animals often shown in TV commercials. Now about 70 per cent are brown Jersey cows, which are smaller but produce a fattier milk.

"We wanted to graduate to a more efficient cow," said Medeiros, who operates a 500-acre (202ha) dairy farm in California's Fresno County.

The switch reflects the resurgence of dairy products like cheese and butter as low-fat diets have faded in popularity. Cheese consumption is at an all-time high, with Americans eating an average of 42 pounds a year in 2022, according to the most recent data available from the US Department of Agriculture. That is up 17 per cent over the previous decade.

After climbing in recent years, butter consumption slipped to 6 pounds per person in 2022, but is still up 9 per cent from a decade earlier.

Milk consumption, meanwhile, has continued to slide and is at 130 pounds per person a year, a 23 per cent drop from a decade earlier.

"Consumers are eating their dairy these days," said Corey Geiger, lead dairy economist with agricultural lender CoBank.

Farmers have taken note. The amount of butterfat in cow's milk has been inching up over the past decade and hit a record high of 4.08 per cent in 2022, according to USDA data.

That fat is used to make a variety of dairy products. Butter, for example, is at least 80 per cent butterfat. Cheddar cheese is at least 50 per cent butterfat relative to its solids, while levels in softer varieties like brie can be higher.

To squeeze more butterfat out of his cows, Medeiros adds oilseeds like cottonseed and canola to their feed, which is otherwise mostly made of corn, hay and other grain meal. The use of such fat boosters more broadly depends on prices; however, a tough growing season made cottonseed too expensive for many farmers this year.

Another change helping dial up fat levels in milk: Cross-ventilated barns that ensure animals don't get too hot. In addition to reducing stress and helping boost overall milk production, keeping cows cool helps them get fatter – and produce fattier milk. "We're seeing a lot more money invested in fans and sprinklers," said Michael Hutjens, professor of animal sciences emeritus with the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. He said breeding and genetics could help push up fat levels in milk even more.

It isn't just about butterfat, though. With live cattle futures near record highs, for instance, bigger Holsteins could be more valuable when they're sold to be slaughtered for beef. Farmers also need to consider how much milk they can produce.

It is why some farmers are crossbreeding Holsteins and Jerseys to create HoJos. The hybrids produce more milk than a typical Jersey, while also making fattier milk than a typical Holstein.

In southern Michigan, dairy farmer Katelyn Packard's 400-cow herd is mostly Holsteins, with only a handful of HoJos and a few Jerseys. She said she has increased the fat levels in her herd's milk to 4.3-4.4 per cent in recent years with careful temperature controls, dietary adjustments and a monitoring system that tracks their eating and activity.

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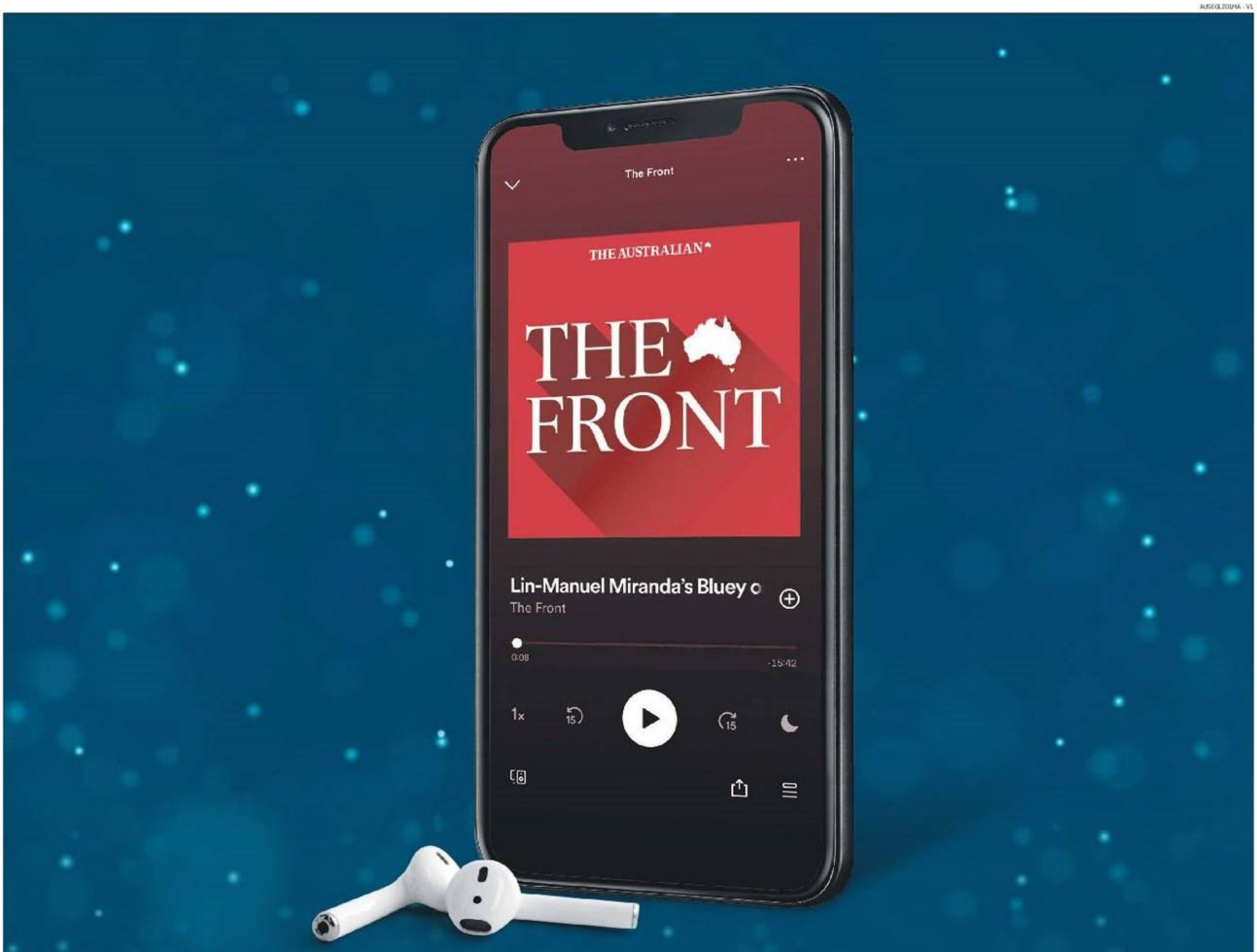

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For the informed Australian

RATE CUTS NOT GUARANTEED

It all depends on inflation and chance events this year

PAUL BRENNAN

There's a lot riding on financial markets getting it right with their bet that central banks will cutting interest rates this year, led by large cuts in the US.

Significantly, the rate-cutting expectations embedded in financial markets reflect a view that inflation will continue to head back to central banks' targets without a marked rise in unemployment.

Not only would borrowers benefit from the lower cost of servicing their mortgages, which in Australia has seen possibly 15-20 per cent of variable-rate owner-occupiers drawing on financial reserves to keep their heads above water, but households more broadly would benefit from more manageable rises in the cost of living which were more than offset by increases in wages. And jobs would still be relatively plentiful.

Rate cuts in the US, the lead global economy, could be expected to follow in short order elsewhere, including Australia.

Indeed, since the middle of last decade there has been a very high correlation been movements in official US interest rates and in Australia.

In fact, since 2019 the correlation has been virtually one-to-one, reflecting the close inflation and labour market outcomes in the US and Australia.

However, history would suggest that such a happy combination of events is difficult to achieve, particularly as one of the drivers of the breakout of inflation since the pandemic has been strong demand, fanned by ultra-stimulatory monetary and fiscal policies.

Across a range of economies, demand still appears relatively resilient, with labour markets remaining tight.

JOEL CARRETT

Inflation continues to move in the right direction

Consequently, premature easing of monetary policy could set off a new cycle of rising inflation, forcing central banks to reverse any rate cuts.

And it's not as if financial markets always get it right. For example, at the start of last year financial markets were pricing two 25bps rate rises by mid-year, with those rises reversed by the end of the year. The actual outcome was a long way from that.

The Fed lifted official interest rates four times last year and did not cut rates. In Australia, markets anticipated three rate rises by the RBA last year but the bank overdelivered on these expectations, lifting the cash rate five times.

Moreover, central banks are not forecasting the deep rate cuts priced into financial markets.

The median of the so-called dot plot of US Federal Open Market Committee member forecasts is for three 25bps rate cuts this year.

This is a long way from the six cuts currently priced in US financial markets.

In Australia, the RBA is yet to provide any hint it is considering rate cuts. Indeed, its guidance is that further tightening of monetary policy may be needed to ensure that inflation returns to the target of 2-3 per cent "in a reasonable time frame".

Reflecting this, financial markets are more cautious about the prospects for rate cuts by the RBA this year. Currently two rate cuts are priced by the end of the year, with the first not until August.

Interestingly, this is more consistent with the three US rate cuts in the Fed's dot point, rather than the six priced into US financial markets.

How likely are two rate cuts by the RBA later next year?

The good news is that inflation is continuing to move in the right direction and slightly faster than expected.

The monthly CPI indicator eased further in November and is continuing to follow the favourable lead from lower US inflation.

The latest local data also tentatively suggest that both headline and underlying inflation will end this year slightly lower than the RBA's forecast of 4.5 per cent.

If inflation does continue to track in line or better than the RBA's forecasts, then the market's expectation of two 25bps rate cuts could be justified.

This would still leave the nominal cash rate above the inflation rate, thereby helping to unwind structural distortions from the low money era.

But the RBA is also forecasting only a marginal rise in the unemployment rate from the current 3.9 per cent to a peak of 4.3 per cent.

This implies only a mild easing in the tight labour market, posing a risk to the inflation outlook, as does the stimulus from the large legislated personal tax cuts from the middle of the year.

As a result, the case for rate cuts is still very much data- and event-dependent and unlikely to be resolved any time soon.

Paul Brennan is Suncorp's chief economist.

Shareholder obsession taints Boeing's sky-high standards

DOMINIC O'CONNELL

In the late 1990s and early noughties as an aerospace correspondent I was a regular visitor to Boeing's factories in Seattle.

It was always the same routine: up early for a bus to the first of many meetings at 7am, a gripping affair in a beige conference room in a building identified by letter and number.

There were earnest engineers and executives – some unironically called Randy – sporting buzzcuts, blue shirts and chinos. There were big trays of doughnuts, gallons of coffee so weak it scarcely deserved the name, and hours of presentations about the latest Boeing engineering triumphs.

The overall message was that any airline executive choosing to buy from Airbus was clearly in need of psychiatric help.

Then it was off to the enormous assembly lines at Renton and Everett before "cocktail hour", where the execs would sip a soda from 5.30pm to 6.30pm before scurrying off home to bed.

That's a bit of an exaggeration, but Boeing had a distinct culture: slightly military, bland and humourless, but dedicated and single-minded in purpose.

We are Boeing, we created modern jet travel, we built the rocket that took man to the moon, we make the best aircraft in the world, and that's how it's going to stay.

It was never entirely true, of course: the first jet airliner was built by Britain's de Havilland, not Boeing; other companies were also involved in making the Saturn V; and you could argue the toss over whether their aircraft were the best. But there was no doubt what the Boeing execs and engineers believed, and with good reason.

Boeing was for decades America's single biggest exporter by value, a repository of the country's technology leadership in aviation, defence and space, a cornerstone of the military-industrial complex.

The engineers I used to meet, by now probably in retirement in Florida, must be reading about the company's latest woes with a sense of disbelief.

Boeing is also no longer at the commanding heights of the US economy

While investigators have not yet released a definitive verdict on what caused an Alaska Airlines aircraft to lose part of its fuselage mid-flight a week ago, forcing an emergency landing, it looks increasingly likely that Boeing's own manufacturing and quality assurance processes were at fault.

The door plug that fell out was held on by four bolts, to be tightened and then locked in place with a pin. Alaska and United Airlines, the other big operator of the particular type of aircraft involved, a variant of the 737 Max 9, have found multiple examples of these bolts being loose.

How the hell, the old engineers will be exclaiming, could an aircraft leave the factory with safety-critical bolts not tightened and locked?

The better question might be: what happened to the single-minded culture I encountered 30 years ago? There is a large body of evidence to suggest it has been badly eroded.

The most damning example is the flight-control software problems that led to two fatal crashes of the Max, in 2018 and 2019, killing 346 people. The model was grounded for nearly two years and the affair cost Boeing about $US20bn, including $US2.5bn in fines and compensation to settle a criminal fraud charge that the company and its staff had deliberately hoodwinked the US aviation regulator, the Federal Aviation Administration.

"Boeing's employees chose the path of profit over candour by concealing material information from the FAA ... and engaging in an effort to cover up their deception," the Department of Justice said.

The public focus on the Max software saga distracted attention from a catalogue of more mundane problems.

There were manufacturing defects on the 787, a larger plane and a strong seller. Airlines discovered, for example, that there were tiny gaps between panels that had been incorrectly fitted. The problems were bad enough that deliveries were suspended for more than a year from May 2021.

There were similar nagging issues on the Max, the most recent of which prompted airlines to inspect aircraft to check whether bolts in the tailfin had been properly tightened.

One explanation for the fall in standards widely advanced after the Max crashes was that Boeing had become obsessed with shareholder value – that driving up the share price and paying dividends became more important than making the best possible planes.

The idea went hand-in-hand with the shift of the company's headquarters away from its traditional home in Seattle, first to Chicago and then to Washington, DC.

That is part of it, but there are other factors at work. Boeing made plenty of strategic missteps too, allowing Airbus to grow while it fooled around with ideas such as the Sonic Cruiser, a faster aircraft that never made it off the drawing board.

It rushed to put new engines on the old 737 to create the Max, rather than spend the money that a new aircraft design would require.

And there were scandals aplenty at the top; in 2004 Mike Sears, then finance director, was fired after it emerged he had discussed a job at Boeing with Darleen Druyun, an air force official, while she was considering Boeing bids for defence contracts. Sears later went to jail for four months. Phil Condit, then chief executive, resigned a week after Sears got the boot. Condit's replacement, Harry Stonecipher, quit a year later after admitting to an affair with a colleague.

There have been problems further down the tree. Boeing's workforce has always expanded and shrunk as cycles of demand have come and gone. After the downturn caused by the pandemic, however, many experienced workers did not return. Boeing insiders say the company normally expects to rehire about three quarters of the production-line staff it would stand down in a slump. This time it was one quarter.

Boeing is also no longer at the commanding heights of the US economy. When I was visiting Seattle, it was still a Boeing town. Sure, Microsoft was on the rise, but Boeing ruled the roost. Now the companies' fortunes have diverged, as their stockmarket value shows. Boeing, which got above $US200bn five years ago, is now valued at $US138bn. Microsoft is worth $US2.8 trillion.

Dave Calhoun, Boeing's boss, has done the right thing by not trying to shift the blame to Spirit Aerosystems, the supplier that makes the fuselage. He said Boeing had to "acknowledge our mistake".

THE TIMES

Bullish stockmarket has ignored the Covid glitch

JAMES MACKINTOSH

If you're finding it hard to remember the pandemic, you're in good company. Investors have already consigned the Covid chaos to history.

Someone who put $US1000 in the S&P 500 in December – when the first infections occurred in Wuhan, China – and reinvested dividends would have made 6.8 per cent annualised after inflation and had $US1299 by the end of last year. That return is hang in line with the annualised return investors have received in the stockmarket since 1802.

Gross domestic product is expected to have finished last year all but identical to the official forecasts made in 2019, despite the virtual shutdown of the economy. Someone who slept through it all would be shocked only that economists got something right, for a change.

This all feels wrong. Surely the economy can't just be closed down without any repercussions for growth or share prices? Surely more than a million American dead can't be irrelevant to finance?

There's a positive spin: Perhaps the stock gains were just a natural catch-up from the shutdowns, a reversion to normal returns. Over long periods, stocks have tended to return 6.5 per cent to 7 per cent a year after inflation, including dividends but ignoring taxes, as Wharton finance professor Jeremy Siegel set out in his popular book, "Stocks for the Long Run". Hold for long enough, and gains above inflation have been assured – with long enough being a bit under 20 years. Just buy and hold, pandemics be damned.

There are a few flaws in the argument. First of all, even the strongest supporters of Siegel wouldn't expect four-year returns to match long-run averages except by chance, because there can be wild swings over such short periods.

Second, it takes the returns from the peak, or close to the peak (US stocks actually reached their pre-Covid high in February 2020). The idea that when you buy doesn't matter is obviously wrong, and even more wrong for short periods; buy just before a huge fall, and it can take a really long time just to get back to the average return.

An investor who bought US stocks in January 1973, before the Arab oil embargo knocked half the value off the S&P 500, has made 6.6 per cent a year in the half-century since, again after inflation and including dividends, fractionally below the super-long-term average. One who bought in the autumn of 1974, when stocks reached their low, has made a whopping 8.5 per cent a year – a difference that compounds to turning $US1000 into $US54,347, rather than only $US25,545.

Third, the 19th-century data used by Siegel was incomplete. Edward McQuarrie, a retired business professor at Santa Clara University, found that when missing stocks, dividends and other data were added in, the US return wasn't much changed – although bond returns were changed significantly, and bonds beat stocks over the 19th century as a whole.

Even his revised data still exclude Confederate stocks and the collapse and recapitalisation of the New York insurance sector after the great fire of 1835, so it's plausible that investors could have lost money over more than 20 years.

Stocks didn't reliably outperform bonds, either, the opposite of what Siegel's earlier data showed. Plus, McQuarrie found that stock prices, excluding dividends, were lower at the end of the century than at the start, which isn't great for those who fail to reinvest payouts.

Readers might reasonably respond that obviously losses are possible over long periods. Russia and China's thriving stockmarkets went to zero after their communist revolutions, and Japanese stock prices (excluding dividends) are still below their 1989 bubble peak.

London academics Elroy Dimson, Paul Marsh and Mike Staunton say that from 1900 on, 16 years was enough to guarantee positive real – but only in the US. Their work on other markets showed it was possible to lose money after inflation and dividends for 98 years in Austria and more than half a century in Japan, France, Italy, Germany, Spain and Belgium, some without losing major wars.

Coming back to the short term, it's safe to say that the past four years were highly unusual. The gains from the pre-Covid peak were the best for any four-year period in the past half-century from a pre-bear market peak, and the past four years included two bear markets. Four years after the peak of stockmarket cycles in the 1970s, 2000 and 2007 investors were still nursing real losses, with even 1987's crash – hardly a bear market – offering smaller gains four years past the pre-crash high.

> For real returns to continue at historic levels, the economy will have to start delivering profit without government help

Some of the unusually rapid return to form this time is thanks to the rapid recovery of the economy from lockdowns, which was itself in part because of pent-up demand.

But much of the rebound in both economy and markets was thanks to massive government deficit spending, which isn't sustainable. Some of the rest is because stocks are even more highly valued than at the pre-pandemic peak. The S&P 500 reached 19.1 times the estimate of forward 12-month earnings in February 2020, the highest since the dot-com bubble of 2000. The multiple is now slightly higher, at 19.3 times, suggesting investors expect earnings to grow even faster than they thought back then.

For real returns to continue at historic levels from here, the economy will have to start delivering profit without so much government help, or valuations will have to rise even higher – both big asks.

This doesn't mean stock prices are sure to fall, or that the US will break its long-term record of no real losses over two decades. But even bulls should plan for lower returns ahead.

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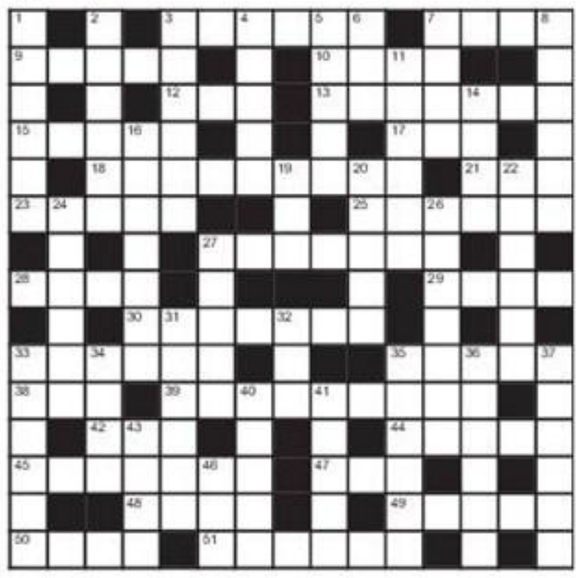
QUICK 13,034

Solution inside tomorrow



ACROSS
3 Bread cutter (6)
7 Dull sound (4)
9 Fish (5)
10 An air (4)
12 Sharp blow (3)
13 Lifelike art style (7)
15 Fragrance (5)
17 Large liquids container (3)
18 Burial place (9)
21 Female sheep (3)
23 Casts off (5)
25 Coating on teeth (6)
27 Bravery (7)
28 Capital of Peru (4)
29 A scrap (4)
30 Goals (7)
33 Harsh (6)
35 Jewelled coronet (5)
38 Commotion (3)
39 Segregating (9)
42 Island state (abbr) (3)
44 Third canonical hour (5)
45 Go before (7)
47 Obtain (3)
48 Egyptian goddess (4)
49 Happening (5)
50 Require (4)
51 Wise counsellor (6)

DOWN
1 Wanders off (6)
2 Sullenly ill-humoured (6)
3 Thongs (6)
4 Drive forward (5)
5 Planet (5)
6 Regret (3)
7 Rhythmic Indian music (4)
8 Storybook maiden (6)
11 Birds (6)
14 One thing (4)
16 Settle a dispute (7)
19 Dove's call (3)
20 Emits fumes (5)
22 Commotion (6)
24 Greeted (6)
26 Stupid (7)
27 Trims (5)
31 Gets up (6)
32 Slippery fish (3)
33 Chinese boat (6)
34 Ballot choice (4)
35 Stifled laugh (6)
36 Concurs (6)
37 Representatives (6)
40 Abnormally fat (5)
41 Jargon (5)
43 Sour (4)
46 Obscure (3)

SUDOKU

Solution inside tomorrow

		6	5			9	8	1
8						6		
		9			6		2	
5			7		3			
	1				4		7	
1					7	3	6	
			9			8		
		3		2				5

ADVANCED

	7						8	
5					2		7	
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	1	7				6		9
	4							
	3		5			4		1
1	9				8			
			3			2		
			1		5			7

EASY

1051

CIRCUIT BREAKER

How many words of four letters or more can you make from these letters? In making a word, each letter may be used only once, and the centre letter must be included. No slang, foreign words, hyphens, apostrophes or plurals ending in 's'.

TODAY'S TARGET:
GOOD: 13
VERY GOOD: 16
EXCELLENT: 20
GENIUS: 23

Source Collins Dictionary
Answers below

TAKE THE CHALLENGE

Answers to The Challenge and Word Watch below

1 Storm Hunter is best known for her involvement in which sport?
(a) Soccer
(b) Cricket
(c) Tennis
(d) Netball

2 Bangui is the capital city of which country?
(a) Eswatini
(b) Democratic Republic of the Congo
(c) Somalia
(d) Central African Republic

3 The cello gets its name from which word?
(a) Bassocello
(b) Chortlocello
(c) Violoncello
(d) Quatrocello

4 In which sea is the Isle of Man located?
(a) North Sea
(b) Irish Sea
(c) Mediterranean Sea
(d) Baltic Sea

5 Peter Scanavino plays the role of Dominick "Sonny" Carisi, Jr. in which TV series?
(a) *Law & Order: SVU*
(b) *The Blacklist*
(c) *NCIS: Los Angeles*
(d) *S.W.A.T.*

6 *The Mikado* is an 1885 comic opera by which musical team?
(a) Lerner and Loewe
(b) Rodgers and Hammerstein
(c) Rodgers and Hart
(d) Gilbert and Sullivan

7 What was the first team to score over 200 runs in a single game during the 2023–24 Big Bash League tournament?
(a) Melbourne Renegades
(b) Brisbane Heat
(c) Adelaide Strikers
(d) Sydney Thunder

8 Which chemical element gets its symbol from the word wolfram?
(a) Silver
(b) Tungsten
(c) Platinum
(d) Mercury

9 Kamisese Mara has served as president, vice-president and prime minister of which country?
(a) East Timor
(b) Indonesia
(c) Tonga
(d) Fiji

10 The 2020 album *Positions* is the sixth studio album by which singer?
(a) Beyoncé
(b) Ariana Grande
(c) Taylor Swift
(d) Delta Goodrem

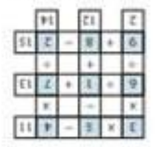
WORD WATCH

1. WHAT IS IT TO JALOUSE?
2. WHAT IS PHARYNGOLOGY?
3. WHAT IS A LITERATOR?

NUMBER CRUNCH

	x		−		11
x		−		x	
	÷		+		13
÷		+		÷	
	+		−		15
2		12		14	

Insert each number from 1 to 9 in the shaded squares to solve all the horizontal and vertical equations. **Multiplication and division are performed before addition and subtraction.**



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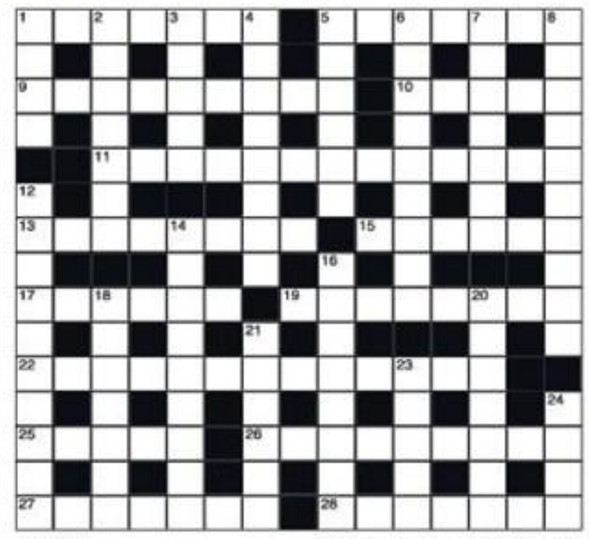
Solution inside tomorrow



ACROSS
1 Dog in New Jersey, one attached to army HQ (7)
5 Small tree father brought back, inspired by member's support (7)
9 Month amphibious troops originally introduced Dutch soldiers (9)
10 Soft rock prince found in the Kent area (5)
11 Odyssey of pair keeping 1987 car before one race (13)
13 Protractedly taken in about northern form of writing (8)
15 Restrained introduction to history in class (6)
17 Conclusion: pig, frog and bulldog all do it (6)
19 Walker's extremely smart luxury car (8)
22 Acquisitive individual tucking into my food, a former crooner (5-8)
25 Retired fellow at home in cattle-raising country (5)
26 Deficit which can possibly lead to lengthy cold spell? (9)
27 Better thus to pen extremely leisurely song (7)
28 Twelve new rings Andy distributed (7)

DOWN
1 Black Aussie truck in Scottish island (4)
2 Become more inclined to visit writer penning tango (7)
3 Rugby fellow going over part of Belgium (5)
4 Needy girl kept by funky bloke (8)
5 Foul reportedly observed by police officer and daughter (6)
6 Nut cooking chips at Vigo regularly (9)
7 Wine a woman briefly describes at last in slanting script (7)
8 Misguidedly get near her tropical tree (9)
12 Like some senior councillors raving under tree (10)
14 Polish gang set up attractive lure for victims (9)
16 Intractable objections raised principally by old sailors (8)
18 Abandoned Legoland, heading off for the Lifford area (7)
20 Young chap carrying goods, a right dawdler! (7)
21 Art work little Albert's left in the open air (6)
23 Knowledgeable about getting hold of Rachmaninoff's first prelude (5)
24 Carry on adopting Oscar's nose (4)

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TELEVISION

Home And Away 7.00PM SEVEN

Gladiators 7.30PM TEN

Blanca 10.45PM SBS

ABC TV (2) HD (20)

6.00 **News Breakfast.**
9.00 **ABC News Mornings.**
10.00 **Movin' To The Country.** (Rpt)
10.30 **Movin' To The Country.** (Rpt)
11.00 **Antiques Roadshow.** (Rpt)
12.00 **ABC News At Noon.**
1.00 **Vera.** (Ma, Rpt)
2.30 **Back Roads.** (Rpt)
3.00 **The Cook And The Chef.** (Rpt)
3.25 **Tenable.** (Rpt)
4.15 **Antiques Roadshow.** (Rpt)
5.15 **Love Your Garden.**
6.00 **Back Roads: Lightning Ridge, NSW.** (Rpt) Heather Ewart pays a visit to the northern NSW outback opal mining town of Lightning Ridge.
6.30 **Hard Quiz.** (PG, Rpt) Presenter Tom Gleeson grills four self-declared experts in a comedic quiz show.
7.00 **ABC News.** Takes a look at the top stories of the day, including coverage of developing stories and events.
7.30 **7.30.** Laura Tingle presents an analysis of events from an Australian perspective.
8.00 **Revenge: Our Dad The Nazi Killer.** (Ma) Part 1 of 2. Three brothers set out to discover the truth about their father who allegedly murdered a Nazi.
9.00 **You Can't Ask That: Former Cult Members.** (Mal, Rpt) Former cult members share their stories, from how they joined to what they were subjected to on the inside.
9.35 **Louis Theroux: Transgender Kids.** (Man, Rpt) Louis Theroux travels to San Francisco to meet the professionals and the kids they are helping to transition.
10.35 **ABC Late News.** Coverage of the day's events, with a look at news breaking as a new day starts elsewhere in the world.
10.50 **War On Waste.** (PG, Rpt) Part 1 of 3.
11.55 **Changing Ends.** (PG, Rpt) Alan gets the acting bug.
12.15 **Love Your Garden.** (Rpt) Presented by Alan Titchmarsh.
1.05 **Tenable.** (Rpt) Presented by Warwick Davis.
1.50 **Rage.** (MA15+adhlmsv) Continuous music programming.
4.40 **The Durrells.** (PG, Rpt)
5.30 **7.30.** (Rpt)

SEVEN (7) HD (70)

6.00 **Sunrise.**
9.00 **The Morning Show Summer Series.** (PG)
11.30 **Seven Morning News.**
12.00 **Home And Away.** (PGarc Rpt) Two lives hang in the balance.
12.30 **Home And Away.** (PGarc Rpt) Cash tries to get to Eden in time.
1.00 **Home And Away.** (PGarc Rpt) Xander is forced to ask Levi for help.
1.30 **Home And Away.** (PG, Rpt) Justin pines for Leah.
2.00 **Border Security: International.** (PG, Rpt) A traveller is put on the watch list.
2.30 **Surf Patrol.** (Rpt) Hosted by Tom Williams.
3.00 **The Chase.** (Rpt) Hosted by Bradley Walsh.
4.00 **Seven News At 4.**
5.00 **The Chase Australia.** Hosted by Larry Emdur.
6.00 **Seven News.** *(Sth/Nth/Wagga/Lismore)*
7News Local. *(Sth/Nth/Wagga/Lismore)*
6.30 **7News @ 6:30.**
7.00 **Home And Away.** (PGa) Tane misreads Harper's friendship. Justin asks Marilyn for a favour.
7.35 **Cricket.** Big Bash League. Game 38. Melbourne Stars v Hobart Hurricanes. From the MCG.
11.00 **Motorway Patrol.** (PGal) A motorist is running out of petrol and running from the pump. An officer rescues a kitten from the fast lane.
11.30 **Highway Cops.** (Ma) A smoker nearly smokes himself when he hits a power pole. Bolt the dog lives up to its name.
12.00 **Bates Motel.** (Mav, Rpt) Norma contemplates a life outside White Pine Bay. Emma and Dylan bond while helping Norman.
1.00 **Bates Motel.** (Mv, Rpt) Norman agrees to get help. Dylan learns some disturbing news about Emma's health.
2.00 **Home Shopping.** (Rpt)
4.00 **NBC Today.** International news including interviews with people from the world of business, politics, media and sports.
5.00 **Seven Early News.**
5.30 **Sunrise.** News, sport and weather.

NINE (9) HD (90)

6.00 **Today.** The latest in news, current affairs, sport, politics, entertainment, fashion, health and lifestyle.
10.00 **Australian Open Tennis Pre-Show.** Reviews, previews, interviews, highlights and opinions from the Australian Open at Melbourne Park.
11.00 **Tennis.** Australian Open. Day 2. From Melbourne Park. Hosted by Tony Jones.
4.00 **Tennis.** Australian Open. Afternoon 2. From Melbourne Park. Hosted by Roz Kelly.
6.00 **9News.** *(NBN)* **NBN News.**
7.00 **Tennis.** Australian Open. Night 2. From Melbourne Park. Hosted by Tony Jones.
11.00 **Tennis.** Australian Open. Late-night 2. From Melbourne Park. Hosted by Tony Jones.
12.00 **New Amsterdam.** (Mam, Rpt) Bloom, Iggy and Reynolds rally around Max as he deals with the fallout from Helen's decision. Bloom gives extra space to Leyla but is in for a surprise. Reynolds and Wilder help a young terminal patient.
1.00 **Family Law.** (Ma, Rpt) Abby and Daniel represent a trans teen whose grandfather is blocking access to hormone replacement therapy.
2.00 **Destination Australia: Rottnest Island.** (Rpt) Jo Beth Taylor and Scherri-Lee Biggs take in all that is on offer on WA's favourite holiday island, Rottnest.
2.30 **Global Shop.** (Rpt) Home shopping.
3.00 **TV Shop: Home Shopping.** (Rpt)
4.00 **Believer's Voice Of Victory.** (PGa) Religious program.
4.30 **Explore TV: Norfolk Island.** (Rpt) Part 1 of 4. Explores Norfolk Island's history, environment, food, and adventures.
5.00 **9News Early.**
5.30 **Today.** The latest in news, current affairs, sport, politics, entertainment, fashion, health and lifestyle.

Please Note: Programs are correct at the time of print and are subject to change by the networks.

TEN (10) HD (1)

6.00 **The Talk.** (Return, PGa)
7.00 **Everyday Gourmet With Justine Schofield.** (Rpt)
7.30 **Entertainment Tonight.** (Rpt)
8.00 **Farm To Fork.** (Rpt)
8.30 **Good Chef Bad Chef.** (Rpt)
9.00 **Judge Judy.** (PG, Rpt)
9.30 **The Bold And The Beautiful.** (PGa, Rpt)
10.00 **The Yes Experiment.** (Rpt) Hosted by Emmaline Carroll Southwell.
10.30 **Luxury Escapes.** (Rpt) Sophie Falkiner visits Singapore.
11.00 **Food Trail: South Africa.** (Rpt) Warren Mendes explores South Africa.
11.30 **My Market Kitchen.** (PGl, Rpt) Cooks prepare a variety of dishes.
12.00 **10 News First: Midday.** The latest breaking news stories.
1.00 **Dr Phil.** (PGls, Rpt) Dr Phil counsels a troubled couple.
2.00 **Jamie Oliver: Cooking For Less.** (Rpt) Jamie Oliver whips up budget recipes.
3.00 **Entertainment Tonight.** Hollywood's hottest stories.
3.30 **Farm To Fork.** Inspiring recipes for the kitchen.
4.00 **Neighbours.** (PGa) Nicolette is caught in a dangerous web.
4.30 **The Bold And The Beautiful.** (PGa) Finn and Bridget race to save Eric's life.
5.00 **10 News First.**
6.30 **The Project.** The hosts and guest panellists take a look at the day's news, events and hot topics.
7.30 **Gladiators.** (Premiere, PGv) Everyday Aussie challengers take on the gladiators in a series of iconic events, as well as brand-new challenges.
8.55 **FBI: Most Wanted.** (Mav, Rpt) The team pursues the suspects responsible for an explosion at an Ohio energy plant.
9.55 **FBI: Most Wanted.** (Mav, Rpt) Remy pursues a depraved pastor and his sadistic brother who kidnapped two teenagers.
10.50 **The Project.** (Rpt) A look at the day's news.
12.00 **The Late Show With Stephen Colbert.** (PG) Hosted by Stephen Colbert.
1.00 **Home Shopping.** (Rpt)
4.30 **CBS Mornings.** Morning news and talk show.

SBS (3) HD (30)

6.00 DW English News. (Germany)
6.30 ABC America This Week. (US)
7.30 France 24 English News. (France)
8.00 DD India News Hour. (India) **9.00** Destination Flavour Down Under Bitesize. (Rpt) **9.10** Cook Up With Adam Liaw Bitesize. (Rpt, Australia) **9.15** World's Most Secret Homes. (PG, Rpt, UK) **10.10** Paddington Station 24/7. (Rpt, UK) **11.00** Vienna: Empire, Dynasty And Dream. (PGa, Rpt, UK) **12.10** BBC News At Ten. **12.30** ABC World News Tonight With David Muir. **1.00** PBS News Weekend. (US) **1.30** Al Jazeera News Second Edition. (Qatar) **2.00** Destination Flavour China Bitesize. (Rpt) **2.05** Tony Robinson: WWII By Drone. (Mav, Rpt, UK) **3.00** Mastermind Australia. (Rpt, Australia) **3.30** The Cook Up With Adam Liaw. (Rpt, Australia) **4.00** The Supervet. (UK) **5.00** Motor Racing: Dakar Rally: Stage 7 Highlights.
6.00 **Mastermind Australia.** (Rpt, Australia) Presented by Marc Fennell.
6.30 **SBS World News.**
7.30 **Jonathan Ross' Myths And Legends: Wales.** (PGa, UK) Part 2 of 4. Jonathan Ross explores Wales, a country filled with hidden and intriguing legends.
8.25 **Isle Of Wight: Jewel Of The South.** (UK) The locals put their best foot forward for the final of the island-wide talent competition.
9.20 **The Secret Life Of Lighthouses: Muckle Flugga.** (PG, Rpt, UK) Part 2 of 3. Rob Bell visits the impossible lighthouse at Muckle Flugga in the Shetland Islands.
10.15 **SBS World News Late.**
10.45 **Blanca.** (MA15+a, Ital) A boy is found dead in an ancient manor.
11.45 **Reyka.** (MA15+av, Rpt, South Africa) A criminal profiler battles crime.
12.45 **Reyka.** (MA15+av, Rpt, South Africa)
1.40 **Reyka.** (MA15+av, Rpt, South Africa)
2.40 **Reyka.** (MA15+av, Rpt, South Africa)
3.40 **Going Places With Ernie Dingo.** (Rpt)
4.40 **Bamay.** (Rpt, Australia)
5.00 **NHK World English News Morning.** (Japan)
5.30 **ANC Philippines The World Tonight.** (Philippines)

FOXTEL HIGHLIGHTS

FOX8 (108)

11.30am Two And A Half Men. (M) **12.00pm** To Be Advised. **1.00** Taskmaster. (M) **2.00** Taskmaster. (M) **3.00** Two And A Half Men. (M) **3.30** Two And A Half Men. (M) **4.00** Two And A Half Men. (M) **4.30** Entourage. (MA15+) **5.00** Entourage. (MA15+) **5.30** Taskmaster. (M) **6.30** Taskmaster. (M) **7.30** Taskmaster Champion Of Champions 3. **9.00** Krapopolis. (M) **10.00** Two And A Half Men. (M) **10.30** Two And A Half Men. (M) **11.00** Two And A Half Men. (M) **11.30** Entourage. (MA15+) **12.00am** Entourage. (MA15+) **12.25** Krapopolis. (M) **1.15** Superstars (WWF) (M)

FOX SHOWCASE (112)

6.00am The Walking Dead. (MA15+) **10.00** Downton Abbey. (M) **11.00** Oslo. (2021) (M) **1.00pm** The Wire. (MA15+) **2.00** Big Little Lies. (M) **3.00** Downton Abbey. (M) **4.00** To Be Advised. **5.00** **Entitled.** (M) **6.00** **The End.** (MA15+) **6.30** **Downton Abbey.** (M) **8.30** **True Detective: Night Country.** **9.30** **Bookie.** (MA15+) **10.30** **The Wire.** (MA15+) **11.30** **True Detective: Night Country.** **12.30am** Downton Abbey. (M) **1.30** The Newsroom. (M) **2.30** Six Feet Under. (MA15+) **3.30** Carnivàle. (MA15+) **4.30** Bored To Death. (M) **5.00** Entourage. (M)

BBC FIRST (119)

10.00am Call The Midwife. (PG) **11.05** Chivalry. (MA15+) **11.30** Nolly. (M) **2.10pm** Marie Antoinette. (M) **3.15** Silent Witness. (M) **4.25** Death In Paradise. (M) **5.30** Unforgotten. (MA15+) **6.30** Call The Midwife. (PG) **8.40** Happy Valley. (MA15+) **9.45** The Catch. (M) **10.40** Marie Antoinette. (MA15+) **11.40** Death In Paradise. (M) **12.35am** Unforgotten. (MA15+) **1.25** Silent Witness. (M) **2.25** Beyond Paradise: Behind The Scenes. (PG) **2.40** We Hunt Together. (MA15+) **3.30** Nolly. (M)

Discovery CHANNEL (133)

11.05am Homestead Rescue. (PG) **12.55pm** Naked And Afraid. (M) **1.55** Aussie Gold Hunters. (PG) **2.50** End Of The Rope. (PG) **3.45** Deadliest Catch. (M) **4.40** Dirty Jobs. (PG) **5.35** Aussie Gold Hunters. (PG) **6.35** Gold Rush: Parker's Trail. (M) **7.30** Airplane Repo. (M) **8.30** Outback Opal Hunters. (PG) **9.30** Demolition Down Under. (PG) **10.25** Aussie Gold Hunters. (PG) **11.20** Naked And Afraid. (M) **12.15am** Homestead Rescue. (M) **1.00** Blowing Up History. (PG) **1.50** Deadliest Catch. (M) **2.35** Naked And Afraid. (M)

sky news (103/600)

6.00am Morning Programs. **2.00pm** Afternoon Agenda. **4.30** Business Now With Ross Greenwood. **5.00** The Kenny Report. **6.00** Peta Credlin. **7.00** Bolt Report. **8.00** Sharri. **9.00** Paul Murray Live. **10.00** The Late Debate. **10.30** The Late Debate: The Papers. **11.00** NewsNight. **1.00am** Late Programs.

FOXTEL MOVIES

foxtel movies premiere (401)

6.00 Tár. (2022) (M)
8.35 **What's Love Got To Do With It?** (2022) (M)
10.30 **The Machine.** (2023) (MA15+)
12.25 **Fast X.** (2023) (M)
2.55 **Pearl.** (2022) (MA15+)
4.48 **Assassin Club.** (2023) (MA15+)
6.45 **Evil Dead Rise.** (2023) (MA15+)
8.30 **Children Of The Corn.** (2020) Elena Kampouris. (MA15+)
10.10 **Three Thousand Years Of Longing.** (2022) Tilda Swinton. (M)
12.02 **All My Friends Hate Me.** (2021) (MA15+)
1.40 **She Said.** (2022) (M)
3.52 **Mona Lisa And The Blood Moon.** (2022) (MA15+)
5.40 **I Am Here.** (2021) (M)

foxtel movies family (403)

7.25 **Boonie Bears: Back To Earth.** (2022) (PG)
9.05 **Lyle, Lyle Crocodile.** (2022)
9.10 **Cloudy With A Chance Of Meatballs 2.** (2013)
10.50 **The Smurfs.** (2011)
12.35 **The Smurfs 2.** (2013)
2.25 **Smurfs: The Lost Village.** (2017)
4.00 **Flipper.** (1996) (PG)
5.40 **Puss In Boots: The Last Wish.** (2022) (PG)
7.30 **Lyle, Lyle Crocodile.** (2022)
9.25 **Paddington 2.** (2017)
11.10 **Pompo: The Cinéphile.** (2021) (PG)
12.45 **Paddington 2.** (2017)
2.25 **Prancer: A Christmas Tale.** (2021) (PG)
4.13 **Pan.** (2015) (PG)

foxtel movies comedy (406)

6.00 **Zoolander.** (2001) (PG)
6.45 **Get Him To The Greek.** (2010) (MA15+)
8.40 **Old School.** (2003) (MA15+)
10.15 **The Interview.** (2014) (MA15+)
12.10 **Scary Movie 3.** (2003) (M)
1.40 **Step Brothers.** (2008) (MA15+)
3.20 **Forgetting Sarah Marshall.** (2008) (MA15+)
5.15 **Due Date.** (2010) (MA15+)
6.55 **Boy.** (2010) James Rolleston, Te Aho Eketone-Whitu. (M)
8.30 **Billy Madison.** (1995) Adam Sandler, Bridgette Wilson, Bradley Whitford. (M)
10.05 **The Intern.** (2015) Robert De Niro, Anne Hathaway. (M)
12.05 **Wedding Crashers.** (2005) Owen Wilson. (M)
2.00 **Man Up.** (2015) Simon Pegg. (M)
3.25 **Jackass: The Movie.** (2002) Johnny Knoxville. (MA15+)
4.50 **The Leisure Class.** (2015) Ed Weeks. (M)

foxtel movies greats (410)

6.00 **Stand By Me.** (1986) (M)
7.10 **The Goonies.** (1985) (PG)
9.10 **Gremlins.** (1984) (PG)
11.00 **A League Of Their Own.** (1992) (PG)
1.10 **Major League.** (1989) (M)
3.00 **Boiling Point.** (1993) (M)
4.40 **The Big Lebowski.** (1998) (MA15+)
6.40 **Heart And Souls.** (1993) Robert Downey Jr, Charles Grodin. (PG)
8.30 **The Notebook.** (2004) Rachel McAdams, Ryan Gosling, James Garner. (PG)
10.40 **Cast A Deadly Spell.** (1991) Fred Ward. (PG)
12.20 **Saturday Night Fever.** (1977) John Travolta. (MA15+)
2.15 **Schindler's List.** (1993) Liam Neeson. (M)
5.25 **Blade Runner.** (1982) Harrison Ford. (M)

Please Note: All programs are in Eastern Daylight Saving time. NE01

SCRABBLE

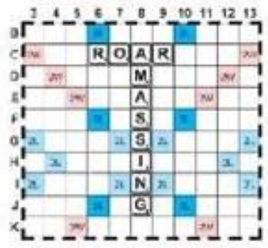
How do you arrange the tiles on your rack? One of the most common techniques employed by players is to arrange the tiles in alphabetical order. This is particularly popular among seasoned tournament players who practise unscrambling anagrams in this format. For example, one may test oneself on the letter-set ILNORST. If these same letters appear on the rack in a game and are alphabetised, this will increase one's chances of spotting the valid seven-letter word available. Can you find it?

Another technique is to separate the vowels from the consonants. This method has been used by the former world champion Joel Wapnick throughout his career. Using the same seven letters, Wapnick would arrange the tiles as IO LNRST in order to trigger the solution.

Another approach that is becoming increasingly favoured is placing the tiles immediately on the rack without subsequently shuffling them. This means that tiles will be sitting on the rack in a random order and may even be placed upside down. Players who use this approach believe that placing the tiles in a systematic order can provide important information to the opponent when they are shuffled.

Two of the top three finishers at a recent event in New York are renowned for placing the tiles in a haphazard way on their rack. The players in question, Ben Schoenbrun and Matthew O'Connor, played each other towards the end of the event. O'Connor missed a playable bonus word early in the game. Can you find it on the board extract below using the letters arranged as follows? (Hint: the word is an uncommon verb formed from a familiar noun.)

A P R H O I B



The main board diagram far left shows a variation of a position that arose later in the game. Can you find Schoenbrun's 43-point move, which he played en route to victory, using his tiles arranged as follows?

P B V O T M U

Definitions
ZEIN a protein occurring in maize
ANURA an order of animals that includes frogs

LETTER VALUES 1 point: A E I O U L N R S T 2 points: D G 3 points: B C M P 4 points: F H V W Y 5: K 8: J X 10: Q Z

SOLUTIONS

SATURDAY'S EASY

9	1	4	7	5	3	2	6	8
5	6	8	9	2	1	7	4	3
7	2	3	8	6	4	5	1	9
2	4	1	5	3	7	9	8	6
8	7	5	6	1	9	3	2	4
3	9	6	2	4	8	1	5	7
6	8	7	1	9	5	4	3	2
4	5	9	3	8	2	6	7	1
1	3	2	4	7	6	8	9	5

SATURDAY'S ADVANCED

6	3	4	8	1	9	7	2	5
7	9	8	2	5	3	1	4	6
2	5	1	4	6	7	8	3	9
1	2	3	9	8	6	4	5	7
5	6	7	1	3	4	2	9	8
4	8	9	7	2	5	3	6	1
3	7	2	6	9	1	5	8	4
9	4	5	3	7	8	6	1	2
8	1	6	5	4	2	9	7	3

QUICK 13,033

TIMES 12,957

1501

TODAY'S SOLUTIONS. CHALLENGE: 1 - (c) Tennis; 2 - (d) Central African Republic; 3 - (c) Violoncello; 4 - (b) Irish Sea; 5 - (a) *Law & Order: SVU*; 6 - (d) Gilbert and Sullivan; 7 - (b) Brisbane Heat; 8 - (b) Tungsten; 9 - (d) Fiji; 10 - (b) Ariana Grande

SCRABBLE: NOSTRIL; BIOGRAPH (J5a) – 70 points; TOMB (B11d)

WORD WATCH: 1. to suspect; to be jealous of; 2. study of the throat; 3. dabbler in learning

CIRCUIT: cede cestode code coked costed deck defect deft desk dock docket does dose dote eked feed FEEDSTOCK feted seed socked socketed steed stocked stoked teed toed

SPORT

OFFICIAL TEAM PARTNER

ARNIE'S WARNING

Socceroos coach looks for finishing touch in Asian Cup {P23}

THE AUSTRALIAN
MONDAY, JANUARY 15, 2024 P21
theaustralian.com.au/sport

OPENING PLAN INITIALLY LAUGHED OFF

I'm serious: Smith's shift never a joke

PETER LALOR
CRICKET

Steve Smith had been pushing to fill in at the top of the order for David Warner as far back as the Ashes, but says the selectors didn't seem to take him seriously.

Things changed a fortnight ago, however, when The Australian put on record that Smith was understood to be quietly serious about the bid and "more open to the idea" than people thought.

"I'd kind of been pushing it for a few weeks, even before Perth I think, and I might have floated it in England just randomly and said 'I'll get up top and I'm happy to play up top'," Smith said.

"But yeah, in Perth, I kind of said 'you know after Davey's done I'm actually keen to get up there' and I don't think they sort of took me seriously until I got to Sydney and I was like, 'No, you know, I'm actually being genuine here, I'd be keen to get up top and face the new ball' and they were like, 'all right, well, we'll take that under advisement and, see how it all looks'."

Smith said he was partially motivated by the knowledge that his move would allow Cameron Green, who has been out of the side since breaking down in the Ashes, to return to the XI lower down the order.

"They're obviously very keen to get Cameron in the side as well, I think and sort of play our best six batters, and for me, it didn't sort of sit right having him come in and bat up top," he said.

"You know, I've played for a long time and I'm an experienced player and I think it's something that I should have done so, yeah, I was key.

"He's (Green) a good player and I think he's suited to No.4. (He) plays there in Shield cricket and does well there.

"I think he's a bit like me in terms of I don't think he likes to wait too much. You don't have to wait as long at four as you do at six.

"So it's a good opportunity for him and that was part of my reason for wanting to go up the order.

"He is going to do a great job there."

Smith said there had been no discussion with selectors over what would happen if his move to the top of the order failed.

"I don't like thinking that way," he said. "I don't want to think negative thoughts at all.

"You know if someone gets injured in the middle and the next batter in is a genuine opener, then, you know, maybe they slot back in there and I go back down, but for right now we've got what we believe is our best six batters playing and I'm slotting in up top."

Smith maintains that he has often batted against the new ball when he was at No.3 and a wicket fell early, but part of the rationale appears to be an attempt to avoid having to face a short-ball attack from the moment he walks to the wicket.

The former captain has been subject to short bowling with a heavy leg-side field since Jofra Archer concussed him at Lord's in 2019.

His career batting average peaked at 65 in that series, but has been in steady decline since teams changed tactics.

Smith has had the tendency to get bogged down in scenarios where he comes in mid-innings, but expects to come out of the blocks a little faster at the top of the order and said sides would be unwilling to bowl short regularly with the new ball.

"I think it helps the scoring rate for sure," he said.

"When you're facing the new ball and there's a bit more attacking going on, I think.

"Over the last few years I've come in after quite a lot of runs and the ball's a bit softer. You have a cover in and maybe four on the leg side and guys are bowling straight and able to control the scoreboard I suppose a bit more and it's probably kept me quieter and made me face a lot more balls to score runs. So perhaps that changes a bit with the new ball. You obviously have a bit more attacking fields and a bit more gaps out there to score runs."

MARSH RETIRES P22

Odd couple likely to become perfect fit as opening act

ROBERT CRADDOCK

Steve Smith is so obsessed by batting he could talk about its many nuances all day and happily have them sprinkled on his cornflakes for breakfast.

Usman Khawaja loves batting too but likes getting away from cricket off the field.

Smith has more quirky batting movements than a hip hop dancer, while Khawaja bats with the economical movement of a man saving every calorie for when it matters.

One style is complex. One is simple. One is left-handed. One is right. One was born in Sydney. The other in Islamabad.

They were raised on different sides of Sydney and made their first-class debuts for NSW three weeks apart in 2008.

They both love aspects of the US – Smith owns an apartment in New York, while Khawaja can be often be seen watching American basketball games on his phone.

Smith and Khawaja have some things in common but many contrasts as they prepare to become the odd couple opening combination no one expected through the majority of their international careers.

If you had suggested a few years ago, when Khawaja was batting at four for Queensland and never expecting to play another Test, that he and Smith would be Australian's 2024 five-day openers, any bookmaker would surely have offered 33-1 and been happy to take your money.

Who knows what will become of their post-David Warner union? But this much is certain – they click.

Over the past 11 years, Smith and Khawaja have been Australia's most bountiful batting partnership, with 10 century stands and 2470 runs at

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Sakkari's worst enemy is more often than not the voice of doubt rumbling inside her head

AFP

Greek star Maria Sakkari hits a return against Japan's Nao Hibino during her opening-round victory at the Australian Open yesterday

WILL SWANTON
TENNIS

Maria Sakkari lays herself bare in the Netflix documentary.

Admits she can be scared to step on to a court. Feels hurt by the cowardly slings and repulsive arrows of social media. Doesn't always swoon at who she sees upon taking a squiz at the mirror.

Feels tempted to throw in the towel and quit the sport. But that'll probably hurt even more.

Day one of the Australian Open gets underway when Andre Agassi, dressed like he's seeking entrance to the first tee at Royal Melbourne Golf Club, in matching shirt, pants and shoes, joins Evonne Goolagong in delivering the trophies to Rod Laver Arena.

Agassi! What a player! He looks amused by the proliferation of bean bags, ping-pong tables and totem tennis around Melbourne Park. He has a jovial, backslapping chat with Carlos Alcaraz in the players' corridor. Clearly, he's a fan. Alcaraz! What a player!

The Australian Open is unique. As if a major has been plonked in the middle of an amusement park/music festival. You walk through a maze of pop-up restaurants, cafes, singers, dancers, musical performances and what appear to be all-day nightclubs before finding a court with Jannik Sinner on it.

In front of Rod Laver Arena, a guy on stage is tinkling the ivories and belting out, "If you like pina colada ..." Tennis' other majors are exclusively for the tennis.

There's no water slide, for example, from the top of Henman Hill to the graveyard court at Wimbledon.

All a hoot. Sakkari is the second match inside the perfumed parlour of RLA. The Netflix star who needs to chill. The real intrigue ain't the forehands and backhands. It's the psychological battle she's admitted to.

The schedule says we're settling in for Sakkari versus Japan's Nao Hibino but really, as ever, it's Sakkari versus Sakkari.

She's trying so damn hard to win a major. Perhaps she's trying too hard, but how do you tell someone to start caring less?

Here she goes again. Trying to land a title that matters.

She's 28 years old and a former world No.3. She's dipped to be seeded eighth at the Open.

All her frustrations, disappointments, anger, anxiety, panic attacks, successes in lesser events and heartache at the majors have been revealed in the latest season of Break Point.

"There was a decline," she says. "I lost my mind a little bit ... Then I just started getting all of these panic attacks and there were just matches that I couldn't breathe ... I was in a dark place for six months.

AFP

Tennis legend Andre Agassi at the trophy arrival ceremony

> 'Sometimes I feel like I want to end my career, but I don't feel like I have achieved everything that I wanted to'
>
> MARIA SAKKARI
> WORLD NO.8

"I was just mentally and emotionally empty. I was scared stepping on the court.

"I have all these people saying that when I get to the later stages of a tournament, I'm guaranteed to lose. That gets in your head. Because of this, I've had many tough moments ... I see myself and I don't like what I see.

"Sometimes I feel like I want to end my career, but I don't feel like I have achieved everything that I wanted to.

"There have been times when I could not deliver that fighting spirit. It's been killing me inside."

Sakkari versus Sakkari becomes a 6-4 6-1 win to Sakkari over Hibino. Three hours before the match, she's clubbing balls on RLA. Hits a mean ball.

She stretches for half an hour in the locker room. Twiddles her thumbs while waiting for Sinner to beat the Netherlands' Botic van de Zandschulp.

She grins from ear-to-wear walking on to the court. Doesn't look scared. Perhaps the truth about her inner turmoil shall set her free.

She's nervous. Well aware she's lost first-round at her last three majors.

Her attacks against Hibino have naught to do with panic. She's an aggressive player with an imposing aura when the mindset is positive and she's flashing her white racquet as if a magic wand. At her best, what a player!

"I know that I don't deserve social media and hate messages," she says. "I'm not going to waste my time and energy thinking about it. I cannot be afraid of failure right now.

"I know whatever your age you can improve and we always have opportunities to get better. We are not done yet."

Sakkari is fit, strong, broad-shouldered and clear-eyed.

She could've won the 2022 French Open. Beat world No.1 Iga Swiatek in the quarter-finals and held match point in the semi-final against Barbora Krejcikova, only to lose. Cue the slings and arrows. Krejcikova won the final like it

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Talk is cheap on plight of Tests

DANIEL CHERNY

West Indies coach Andre Coley has called on cricket's leadership to put up or shut up when it comes to saving the Test format globally, while floating the idea of four-day Tests in a bid to make it more appetising to players.

The Windies have been widely written off for the Frank Worrell Trophy series, which begins in Adelaide on Wednesday.

Having not won a Test series in Australia for more than three decades, and not even won a Test against the Aussies in more than 20 years, the Windies have picked a squad that contains seven uncapped players.

Former captain Jason Holder and all-rounder Kyle Mayers have opted out of the series to prioritise franchise commitments elsewhere.

Such is life for the former Test powerhouse. The region can still produce world-class cricketers but can't pay them enough to always choose Test cricket.

It is not a new phenomenon for the Windies but they may merely have been the canary in the coal-mine for the format given South Africa has named a similarly depleted squad to tour New Zealand this month after its board told Proteas stars to put the Indian-backed SA20 competition first.

Australian cricket leaders have discussed the idea of setting up a global fund to ensure Test cricket remains viable for more than just a handful of nations.

Australian Cricketers' Association chief Todd Greenberg said last month that he feared only India, England and Australia may still be playing the format in a decade.

Coley, appointed Windies Test coach last year, said talk was one thing but actions were another.

"I believe that if we have enough powerbrokers around world cricket who are keen on ensuring that Test cricket continues to be played and becomes a viable option for players, young players, then those people have to voice those opinions and in the lobbies and rooms that can make those decisions, and decisions are made accordingly," Coley said.

"If we really want to keep Test cricket, it is all well and good about talking about it but it really comes down to the people who make the decisions around who can influence decisions.

"If they really believe that Test cricket needs to continue, then find a way to get it done."

Coley, a first-class player for Jamaica in the late 1990s who played in cricket's first Commonwealth Games appearance in 1998, said he believed the skills needed in Test cricket still translated well to the shorter formats.

"The longevity of Test cricket is a global concern," he said. "To find time to play more than two or three Test matches in a series is becoming increasingly difficult with the increase in the number of franchise tournaments that are being played around the world.

"We still believe that playing red-ball cricket is the way to go if you want to learn the game and extend your time in playing because if you look at it, the majority of the best white-ball players are established or were established red-ball players.

Coley pondered whether shortening Tests from five to four days could help make the format more commercially viable.

There are a handful of four-day Tests played outside the men's World Test Championship and in women's cricket.

"You may have to consider potentially Test matches making them four days because you look at the pace of Test matches, the majority of matches are finished in four days," he said.

"So it may be to create more time to make it more relevant maybe potentially instead of five days, maybe four days. Which is closer in line with first-class cricket and the pace of play and so on. Which then makes it even more attractive for white-ball players."

Cocky Djoker survives opening night fright

WILL SWANTON

Novak Djokovic is bullish. Saying the only bloke he can lose to is himself. What a sledge of Carlos Alcaraz, Alex de Minaur and every other player at the Australian Open. I guess you're entitled to talk yourself up when you're the king of Melbourne Park.

There was someone Djokovic forgot to mention as a threat. Dino Prizmic.

The world No.1 huffed, puffed and did just enough to sneak past the Croatian teenager 6-2, 6-7 (5-7) 6-3, 6-4 in a heavy-hitting dogfight on Sunday night that hung in the balance until late in the third set.

A packed house inside Rod Laver Arena was in thrall and full voice. There was a surly air about Djokovic until he kicked clear as the clocked ticked past 11pm.

It was a proper battle.

The 18-year old Prizmic is the French Open junior champion. A qualifier. Just 18 years of age.

His tight shorts brought to mind John McEnroe, Bjorn Borg and Jimmy Connors in the 1980s, or an AFL game next door at the MCG. He let rip with 160km/h forehands, rock-solid backhands and exuded incredible confidence, poise and bravado in his first match on a marquee court against a legendary player. Djokovic avoided an unthinkable upset but it took four hours of hard yakka.

The 36-year-old gives hope to every athlete wanting to press on towards 40.

He's still quick, even if he reckons he's lost a little pace. His stamina is undoubted. He's meticulous about diet and fitness. He's agile, strong and healthy enough to make the most of his reservoir of experience.

Father Time will end up beating Djokovic but it won't happen at this Open. There's no F. Time in the draw.

The Serb's pre-tournament reluctance to acknowledge his peers hinted at a siege mentality against the younger brigade. He knows they're coming after him.

The 20-year-old Alcaraz and Holger Rune, 22-year-old Jannik Sinner and even the 24-year-old de Minaur are desperate to take him down.

To nominate his only threat as "myself" is to proclaim the kingdom is not yet up got grabs. Either that, or he's talking tough because he's feeling vulnerable.

It was Djokovic's second consecutive unconvincing performance. When he succumbed in straight sets to de Minaur at the United Cup, he offered no kind words of congratulations at the net, quickly shaking hands and walking away. His next assignment will be against the winner of Monday's all-Australian battle between Alexei Popyrin and Marc Polmans.

Djokovic began the match dressed as if he wanted to be camouflaged.

Blue shoes, blue socks, blue shorts, blue shirt and one blue sweatband. He went for a white shirt midway through the third set and came good.

He trailed by a break at 2-3, and faced more break points at 3-all, but survived fright night and then thrived with trademark ruthlessness. The fourth set was vintage Djokovic. He was authoritative and relentless.

Walked around with a bit of a swagger. Razzed up the crowd. Got the job done. Prizmic didn't beat him. Nor did he beat himself.

AFP

Top seed Novak Djokovic returns a backhand to Dino Prizmic during his four-hour opening round match on Rod Laver Arena last night

DEMON'S TASK P23

WEST AUSTRALIAN STALWART RETIRES

Marsh's multi-level career at an end

DANIEL CHERNY
CRICKET

Shaun Marsh feels a sense of relief and sadness as he retires from professional cricket after a career spanning almost 25 years.

The West Australian great announced on Sunday that the BBL match between his Melbourne Renegades and the Sydney Thunder on Wednesday night would be the final game of a career that started 23 summers ago.

Marsh, 40, played the last of his 38 Tests and 73 one-day internationals in 2019, but kept playing domestically for WA before retiring at the end of last season.

Marsh continued into this BBL season with the Renegades after he moved from the Perth Scorchers in 2019.

Having overcome a calf injury his form has not diminished.

The left-hander has posted three half-centuries from five innings this season, including an unbeaten 64 to lead the Renegades to victory against the Melbourne Stars on Saturday night at Marvel Stadium.

The Renegades' underwhelming season, though, has contributed to Marsh's decision, which he made last week, to pull up stumps on his decorated career.

"I probably knew at the start of the season that it was more than likely going to be my last year but there was no sort of decision made up until probably after our second-last game ago," Marsh said on Sunday.

"We had a nine-day break and went home with the family and just felt right then that this was going to be it.

"It's probably a sense of relief but also some sadness knowing that it's all over – sort of leave knowing that you gave everything and it's the right time to walk away.

"Just mentally it was more just knowing that I was probably done.

"My body – even though I feel like I'm batting really well – just moving around in the field has been a lot harder this year and I just thought it was the right time now with where we're at.

Shaun Marsh

"I think everyone at the Renegades had high hopes this year of being a lot further up the ladder and not making the finals gives the guys a good chance now to reset and get some younger players in and build around those players."

The span of Marsh's career is extraordinary. He made his Sheffield Shield debut for WA in early 2001 playing alongside Tom Moody, who was born in 1965.

This season he was on the Renegades' list with young gun Harry Dixon, who was born in 2005.

Marsh, the son of former Australian opener and coach Geoff and older brother of Aussie star Mitch, said team success with the Scorchers and a breakthrough Shield win with WA two summers ago were among the highlights of his career.

Though his Australian career was a mixed bag, he was proud to have reached the highest level and said he could now fully appreciate how special it had been to play international cricket with his brother.

Asked how he would like to be remembered as a player, Marsh, a popular if quiet teammate, said he valued authenticity.

"Just being a good person," he said. "I've always just tried to be myself. I've always tried not to be someone I'm not – and that's something that I'm really proud of – and someone that worked hard and gave his best to the team in every game that I played."

Marsh said he was hopeful longtime WA teammate Cameron Bancroft would be presented with another opportunity at Test level despite having been bypassed for the series against the West Indies.

"No doubt 'Bangers' will be disappointed," Marsh said. "What he's been able to do over the last probably two or three years in WA cricket has been incredible.

"He's been probably the leading run-scorer over the last three years. "I think for him, it's just to go back now and continue to score runs and I have no doubt he will do that.

"If he keeps doing that, then if an opportunity does come up at the top of the order over the next 12 months, hopefully he gets a crack at it."

Bradley sparkles with late birdies

GOLF: Former PGA champion Keegan Bradley closed with back-to-back birdies to grab a share of the third-round lead alongside Grayson Murray in the US PGA Tour Sony Open at Waialae in Honolulu, Hawaii.

Bradley had eight birdies in his seven-under-par 63 and said none were more important than the closing two – a seven-footer at the par-three 17th and a two-putt from 42 feet at the par-five 18th.

"Those were crucial holes to finish up the day and hopefully get in the last group," Bradley said after signing for a 14-under-par total of 196.

He was joined there by Murray, who had four birdies and a five-foot eagle at the par-five ninth in his bogey-free, six-under-par 64.

The leading duo had a one-shot lead over Sam Stevens, who carded a 63. Another five players were three shots back on 199. They included Chris Kirk, who won the season-opening Sentry tournament the week before and is trying to join Ernie Els and Justin Thomas as the only players to sweep the two Hawaiian events in the same year.

Bradley, who won two of his six tour titles last season, said the crowded leaderboard was nerve-racking but fun.

"It's a tricky thing because you can't be staring at the leaderboard all day," he said. "If you make a bogey or a few pars in a row, you can go from leading to 12th in a second.

"I'm trying to just worry about myself," Bradley said. "If I go out and shoot a good round tomorrow, it's going to be tough to beat."

Despite the jammed leaderboard, Bradley said he had a relatively stress-free day.

"Today was one of those days where I had great numbers. I could see every shot," he said. "I wasn't very anxious on that many shots, which is super rare for me."

Murray, who claimed his only PGA Tour title at the Barbasol Championship in his rookie season in 2017, also had a low-stress round.

"Hit a lot of fairways, greens and just a lot of stress-free things," he said. "It adds up to, I would like to say, an easy 64. I don't think 64s are ever easy but sometimes they're a little easier than others."

Murray, who has been open about battling alcohol abuse and fought his way back after a motor scooter accident in Bermuda in 2022, said he had kept his career going with the support of friends, family and colleagues.

"Right when I try to give up, someone gives me a little more inspiration, saying, 'Hey, you got it, you can do it,'" said Murray, who worked his way back through the developmental Korn Ferry tour.

"Those are the people that are close to me that I really lean on in hard times. I've just got to keep pushing through. That's the only way I know how."

AFP

Captaincy stripped over 'safety concerns'

PETER LALOR

David Teeger

Weeks after Usman Khawaja was blocked from wearing a peace message on his shoes, Cricket South Africa has relieved the Jewish captain of his position of its under-19 side following controversy over his public support for Israeli soldiers fighting in Gaza.

South Africa says the decision to strip David Teeger of his captaincy on the eve of the under-19 World Cup was because of safety concerns.

Khawaja was banned by the ICC from putting a peace symbol on his hat following warnings he could not wear shoes that read "all lives are equal" and "freedom is a human right".

Trouble started for Teeger when the cricketer dedicated his Rising Star at last October's Jewish Achiever Awards ceremony to Israel and members of the Israeli Defence Force.

"But more importantly, yes, I've been awarded this award, and yes, I am now the rising star, but the true rising stars are the young soldiers in Israel ... so I'd like to dedicate this award to the South African family that married off one son whilst the other is still missing," Teeger said, as reported by South Africa's Jewish Report, and subsequently published in South African media.

"And I'd like to dedicate it to the state of Israel and to every single soldier fighting so that we can live and thrive in the diaspora."

The comments were particularly controversial in South Africa, the country which has taken Israel to the International Court of Justice alleging genocide.

Complaints were made against Teeger to the South African Sports Confederation and Olympic Committee which conducted an independent inquiry to see if the player had breached any of its codes.

The complaint asserted that the U19 captain's words were "a provocative and inflammatory political statement worsened by the fact that he made it at a time when thousands of innocent Palestinian people – men, women, children and babies – were killed by the Israeli army".

The complaint called Teeger "callous" and his comments "subversive".

Teeger responded and qualified his position in a statement to the hearing.

"My comments made on 22 October 2023 were an expression of appreciation for the efforts of soldiers who were mobilised to protect the citizens of Israel and to secure the release of the hostages taken by Hamas," he said.

"Further, the comments I made on acceptance of the award were intended both to be a personal reflection and not representative of the position of CSA, the Lions or any of the teams in which I participate.

"I appreciate I may have been naive in thinking this personal reflection would be received as such. I regret not giving more consideration to whether my impromptu comments would be scrutinised given my growing prominence in sport or that those comments may be repeated in the media."

Teeger went on to say "my personal and honestly held view is that Israel and its soldiers have not committed genocide, war crimes or crimes against humanity" and cited a similar stance taken by the US and Australian governments, among others.

"Disagree in a respectful manner on a contested and emotionally charged matter is a fundamental pillar of our democracy and constitution," he said. "I respect the right of others to disagree with my view on Israel."

Teeger was cleared of all charges, including "unbecoming or detrimental conduct", making "statements detrimental to the game" or "detrimental to relations between competing teams".

CSA, however, announced on Friday it was stripping Teeger of the captaincy as there were concerns for his and others' safety, but would still allow him to compete in the side.

"We have been advised that protests related to the war in Gaza can be anticipated at the venues for the tournament," a CSA statement read.

The national chair of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, Karen Milner, accused CSA of discrimination.

"The decision by Cricket South Africa to relieve David Teeger of his under-19 captaincy of the World Cup team starting next week in South Africa is an outrageous act of anti-Semitism," Milner said.

"There is no basis for this decision, other than the fact that Teeger is Jewish."

Mitch's Cam shaft call as Smith steps up

GETTY IMAGES

Steve Smith at Adelaide Oval, where he will open the batting for Australia in the first Test against the West Indies

ROBERT CRADDOCK

Mitchell Johnson has questioned Steve Smith's promotion to opener and says selectors deserved to be asked whether Cameron Bancroft was the victim of a vendetta.

The snubbing of Bancroft has triggered a 'Sandgropergate' scandal in Perth. Locals are furious their opener has missed a berth in the Test side to face the West Indies in Adelaide.

In his weekly column for Perth's Sunday Times published on The West Australian's website, Johnson said Smith had "long been the glue" of Australia's top order at No.4 and he could not understand the logic for changing things.

"You can't help but wonder why (selection chairman) George Bailey and the selection panel have gone this way," Johnson wrote. "Do they feel Smith hasn't been at his best and they think this could be a good change for him?

"There are reports that Smithy doesn't like sitting around waiting to bat but he has done that most of his career at fourth in the order – and he's been pretty good at it.

"Is it purely to fit Cam Green back in and give him a shot at No.4? I'm not a big fan of this way.

"You always want your best players at third and fourth in the order. It's a really interesting way of selection and anything could happen."

Bailey, who fell out with Johnson this season following Johnson's comments Bailey was too close to the players, denied at his press conference the panel or any player had any lingering bad vibes towards Bancroft following his fallout with the bowlers for comments he made about the Sandpergate scandal.

"Bailey says there is no issue or vendetta but you can't blame Bancroft – or the public – for questioning this, if he is claiming the selection panel didn't consider the specialist opener among the nation's seven-best batters," Johnson wrote. "It's obviously a confusing message for the West Australian, who has scored the most runs out of all those openers considered and done it over the past couple of years, so any questions around this are fair."

Test cricket's odd couple will likely be perfect partners

Continued from Page 21

an average of 58. Each of these three statistics are chart-toppers for Australia.

Admittedly, that was when Smith was batting down the order so this is a fresh challenge.

The one thing certain with opening partnerships is that nothing is certain when it comes to chemistry.

Justin Langer and Matthew Hayden were like brothers on and off the field and could often be spotted sharing dinner for two in Test week.

Geoff Marsh and David Boon would routinely share a frosty ale and Marsh became godfather to one of Boon's children.

But one of Australia's greatest opening unions – Bill Lawry and Bob Simpson – spent more time together in the middle than they did off field.

"We were just completely different," Simpson said.

"Bill loved his pigeon racing where I would play golf, which didn't interest him at all. Somehow we clicked."

England's Mike Atherton and Alec Stewart were also very much a "business only" outfit.

Atherton once said he never visited Stewart's place for dinner when the Test scene passed through his home region of Surrey, not for any particular reason other than they rarely had dinner together.

With a combined age of 71, Khawaja, 37, and Smith 34, they are one of Australia's oldest opening combinations of recent times.

But they are nowhere near the all-time record held by English greats Jack Hobbs (47) and Frank Woolley (43) when they had a combined age of 90 opening against Australia in 1930.

When it comes to opening the batting, there are no rules.

Kerr-ific way to start year for future star

SURFING: One of Australia's most promising young surfers has won the World Junior Championships in California.

Sierra Kerr, 16, lined up against United States' Zoe Benedetto in the final on Saturday, showing a surfing masterclass with a near-perfect nine out of 10 points to win.

"That was the craziest heat, it's amazing to win," Kerr said.

"I feel like I haven't been surfing that good this contest and I went in the final just going to leave nothing on the table.

"I felt like I actually surfed good, so I was frothing. I wasn't even expecting to qualify for the Challenger Series, I forgot that was a thing, that's insane.

"Thank you to everyone who came and watched, and everyone that's watching."

Sierra is the daughter of aerial pioneer and long-time Australia CT surfer Josh Kerr.

The victory serves as Kerr's maiden World Junior Title, earning her a place in this year's Challenger Series.

The future star took out the gold at last year's ISA World Junior Surfing championships in Rio de Janeiro, defeating USA pair Eden Walla and Lanea Mons in the under 16s.

JAKE GARLAND

Kings flex their title muscle

SEAN TEUMA
BASKETBALL

The Sydney Kings have not given up hope of retaining their NBL crown just yet.

After reaching their lowest point of the season earlier in the round, Sydney responded in emphatic fashion to destroy the New Zealand Breakers 105-76.

In front of a season-high NBL crowd of 16,605 at Qudos Bank Arena, it was the Denzel Valentine and Jaylen Adams show when the star imports made the visitors look second rate.

They combined for 41 points on 21 shots in the first half. Adams dropped 21 and Valentine 20 (eight of nine field goals) when they came out with clear intent to attack and take over the contest.

Former league MVP Adams checked out with 39 points for the evening in just 27 minutes on court.

They were assisted by a nice cameo from Angus Glover, who hit four of six from beyond the arc to chip in with 13 points.

New Zealand coach Mody Maor was at a loss to try to stop a rampant Kings run midway through the opening quarter.

The Kings went on an 11-0 run to open up a 24-12 lead, forcing Maor to burn both first-half timeouts in the space of 54 seconds.

It did little to turn the tide through the first 10 minutes as Sydney held on to a 34-19 advantage at the first break.

Just three days before, the Kings were embarrassed by bottom-placed Adelaide to the tune of 13 points, which resigned them to their eighth loss in their past 11 games.

They fired out of the blocks with 63 points in the first half, hitting 11-15 from long range and shooting at 68 per cent in the first 20 minutes.

During that period they outrebounded the visitors 22-7 to lead by 29 at the main break.

Gigante hits replay button to conquer heartbreak Hill

VAL MIGLIACCIO
CYCLING

AFP

Sarah Gigante wins the Tour Down Under title on Sunday

Australia's newest WorldTour champion Sarah Gigante watched a replay on Saturday night of her conquering Willunga Hill last year before claiming the Santos Tour Down Under title on Sunday.

Gigante, 23, was ecstatic after bouncing back from a horrendous chain of events that included broken bones from bike crashes and myopericarditis – inflammation of the heart muscle and the pericardium.

She created history given that Willunga Hill was added to Australia's premier bike race for the first time after her WorldTour career looked to be in jeopardy last year.

Gigante only raced once with former team Movistar before AG Insurance Soudal signed her last month.

"I watched a replay of when I won last time (at Willunga Hill) at the Festival of Cycling for a bit of a confidence boost," Gigante said after she set a record time of eight minutes and 13 seconds in 2021 when the Santos Tour Down Under was cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"I thought I'll just do that. It was harder this time and I looked behind (when I was climbing Willunga Hill), I was going full gas.

"But there were quite a few girls and I thought 'oh, oh, what if it's a sprint at the top of Willunga that wouldn't suit me?'

"I just knew I had to keep drilling it despite the headwind and one by one they dropped off."

After Gigante's teammate, New Zealand's Ally Wollaston, claimed the Ziptrak stage 1 and the Santos leader's jersey on Friday at Athelstone, the Kiwi worked hard to ensure the Australian would be in a prime position to launch an attack towards the summit.

Saturday's Health Partners stage 2 winner and Santos overall leader Cecilie Uttrup Ludwig was doing her utmost to keep the Tour Down Under title but it slipped away from the Dane during the last climb of the day.

Ludwig was on Gigante's wheel until 2km from the hilltop before she was dropped.

Gigante won the title by 20 seconds over Dutch cyclist Nienke Vinke, 19, (Team dsm-firmenich PostNL), while Australia's Neve Bradbury, 21, (Canyon-Sram) was 33 seconds behind in third place.

Three-time Santos Tour Down Under champion Amanda Spratt finished fourth, 37 seconds behind Gigante.

In a tense start to the race from Adelaide's Tour Village for the first time, Gigante had a "bodyguard" in the lead-up to Willunga Hill.

Teammate Anya Louw watched every move from rivals as Gigante settled nicely into a rhythm in the early stages of the race.

Ludwig's decision to allow Italian Katia Ragusa's early move to go for Queen of the Mountain points just after the 3km mark of the race was a clear tactic that the Dane needed to keep her energy for the grand finale.

Ragusa claimed the maximum 10 points in the first category 1 climb at Windy Point, which put her in pole position to win the QOM jersey overall.

Gigante is expected to beat the start for the Down Under criterium at Victoria Park on Thursday.

SOCCEROOS COACH WANTS MORE FROM ATTACK DESPITE VICTORY IN ASIAN CUP OPENER

Arnold looks for finishing touch

MARCO MONTEVERDE
SOCCER

AFP

Socceroos substitute Bruno Fornaroli is shut down by India's defence during their Asian Cup opening group clash in Qatar

Jordan Bos' elation at scoring his first goal for the Socceroos has been tempered by national coach Graham Arnold admitting Australia has a "lot" to improve on to have any chance of winning the Asian Cup.

The Socceroos' opened their Cup campaign in Qatar with a 2-0 win over India, and while securing three points was the ultimate objective, the Australians struggled for large periods of the game to break down their rivals.

It took 50 minutes for the Socceroos to take the lead, through Jackson Irvine, before former Melbourne City prodigy Bos scored with his first touch of the game 23 minutes later, after coming on as a substitute.

"It was amazing," 21-year-old Bos told *beINSports*.

"I was hoping for the opportunity to get on and it just fell to me first touch, so I couldn't have asked for a better start.

> 'I can honestly say that we've got to improve a lot more than that'
>
> GRAHAM ARNOLD
> SOCCEROOS COACH

"Second half we got the goals we deserved."

However, Arnold expected more from his side, particularly in the first half, when the Socceroos were sluggish in attack despite dominating possession.

"I can honestly say that we've got to improve a lot more than that," Arnold said.

"One disappointment was our set pieces because we work quite a lot on them, and we're very strong with set pieces, but you've got to give credit to India for the way they set up themselves for those set pieces.

"That's something we need to improve on and we will."

Arnold preached patience at halftime and admitted his team was perhaps too "excited" before the match, in anticipation of the start of the tournament.

"There was a little bit of excitement and impatience. We'd been waiting for the last 10 days to get preparations right," he said.

"The messaging at halftime from me was just be patient and it will come. That's one game down, (and) another six to go.

"We're here to win the Asian Cup and you have to have high expectations and put those expectations on the boys and get them to believe in what we can do."

Bos was confident that the Socceroos – who return to Group B action on Thursday night (AEDT) against Syria at Jassim bin Hamad Stadium – could go "all the way".

"We've got the quality and the boys to do it," said Bos, who is now based in Belgium, where he plays his club football for Westerlo.

"We just have to score more goals – get it in the back of the net."

Lack of playmaker could prove costly

ROBBIE SLATER

The lack of a genuine playmaker could hurt the Socceroos at this Asian Cup.

It is the first major tournament in recent years in which Australia hasn't had both or either of Tom Rogic or Aaron Mooy, "No.10s" who pull the strings and play the killer ball that tears defences apart.

Throw in the absence of Ajdin Hrustic, who has also played that role for the Socceroos in recent years, and it's a problem for the Australians evident in their 2-0 win over India. While the Indians never looked like winning, the Socceroos struggled to break them down.

The first half was slow, frustrating and at times hard to watch.

Australia's final third was a problem. India was extremely resolute in defence and the Socceroos found it hard to break down their opponents.

It happens often when the Australians play lowly ranked teams that sit back and defend in a low block.

It's a different story when the Socceroos play against heavyweights of world football who attack and play an open style of football.

That leaves space in their own half that Graham Arnold's men enjoy exposing on the counter attack. It plays to our strengths.

Against teams such as India and some others that the Socceroos will meet at the Asian Cup, we have to make the play in trying to break down sides that defend like their lives are depending on it. It's something the Australians need to work on, but it will improve as the tournament progresses.

In Riley McGree, who had a big impact when he came on against India, the Socceroos have, while not a genuine playmaker, someone who can have a massive affect on games.

Winger Martin Boyle can as well. He looked short of a gallop against India, but will be better for the run.

Boyle's delivery from dead-ball situations needs to improve, as does Craig Goodwin's.

Set pieces are normally a strength for the Socceroos, with giant defender Harry Souttar an obvious target when taking free-kicks and corners. However, it's hard to remember Souttar having a header in India's penalty area, with the service from Goodwin and Boyle lacking quality and penetration.

Therefore, there's a fair bit to work on for Australia.

The main thing is that the Socceroos opened their cup campaign with a win and were never in danger of losing the game.

Maty Ryan was never tested between the posts in a comfortable return from a fractured cheekbone.

Jordan Bos is a huge talent. It wasn't just his goal that was impressive in his cameo, but also his pace and energy.

Like McGree, Bos had a significant impact on the match after coming off the bench and both of them already loom as being crucial to the Socceroos' chances of winning the tournament.

Gustavsson has plan to cover loss of Kerr

ERIN SMITH

Matildas midfielder Tameka Yallop says Tony Gustavsson's tactics which earned the ire of critics will be what gets the national team over the line against Uzbekistan without Sam Kerr.

As Kerr posted on Instagram the first photo of herself after surgery – giving the thumbs up to her 18m followers with her right leg in a compression bandage – the Matildas continued to plot ways to ensure they will not only qualify for the 2024 Paris Olympics but win a medal.

Yallop, talking after Brisbane Roar lost to Newcastle 2-1 on Saturday night, said depth would be key at the Olympic qualifiers.

Gustavsson has worked hard to build depth since taking over the squad in September 2020.

His efforts, which included using inexperienced players against top-class teams such as Spain and Canada, didn't always get a great reaction from fans or pundits – especially after a 7-0 loss.

However, those matches allowed Gustavsson to find rising stars Charli Grant, who has just signed with WSL club Tottenham, and Kyra Cooney-Cross, who is playing for Arsenal.

He also learnt that Australia's under-23s captain, Amy Sayer, was up to playing senior football.

Yallop said now that Kerr had been ruled out of the qualifiers with an ACL injury and was unlikely to play at the Olympics if the Matildas qualified, having depth in the squad had increased confidence that the team could deliver.

"It's tough for Sam and all the girls are rallying around her," Yallop said. "It's such a major injury and for it to happen to anyone is devastating.

"We're all here for Sam and she knows that."

In the final Olympic qualifiers, the Matildas will play Uzbekistan away on February 24 and at home on February 28.

"We have worked hard, especially since TG (Gustavsson) came in, to grow depth within our squad and we can get results without Sam," Yallop said.

"She is an amazing player and a pleasure to watch ... but we have the depth within the squad to perform."

Sakkari's biggest battle is the voices inside her head

Continued from Page 21

was a dagger to Sakkari's heart.

She's covered herself in glory by being so vulnerable in Break Point and she's also given her foes a reason to believe she'll crumble if they can stay in the rumble.

Sakkari led 2-0 but stuttered to two-all, three-all, four-all.

There was an air of uh-oh, here she goes, imploding like she's had one too many pina coladas.

Hibino was calm, capable and had a killer two-handed backhand. Sakkari grumbled to her entourage, "What am I doing? What am I doing?"

They looked at her as if thinking, how do we solve a problem like Maria? At 4-all, she coughed up a double fault. Uh-oh.

She snuck through the first set and ran through the match.

"A first-round, you're always nervous," she said.

"I lost three first-rounds in my last three grand slams so it was a difficult match for me emotionally.

"I'm glad I got the job done. I'm relieved. The first set, sometimes you have to win ugly. The second set was n't ugly."

Netflix and chill.

If everything goes to plan at Melbourne Park, Sakkari will face US Open champion Coco Gauff in the quarter-finals.

She feels uncomfortable about only one of her documentary interviews.

The one in which she flips the bird and tells her critics, "f--- you!"

Now she says: "I was a little concerned with how the episode ended because it was not very ladylike to say the F-word.

"But for what they were asking me, it was very natural. I really hope I don't come across like someone who likes to curse.

"I just think it's nice for people to know what we go through and how hard our life is emotionally. Of course, playing tennis is a nice thing.

"It's not hard. But it's a very demanding sport. You just have to embrace it."

FOR THE RECORD

Basketball

NBL — Round 15

BRISBANE BULLETS 80 (C Smith 19 T Harrison 13 S McDaniel 12 J Bannan 12) bt TASMANIA JACKJUMPERS 77 (M Doyle 19 J McVeigh 17 J Crawford 13); ADELAIDE 36ERS 95 (T Kell 27 L Humphries 18 SD Dash 13 J Wiley 13) bt SYDNEY KINGS 82 (J Adams 20 A Glover 12 K Noi 11); MELBOURNE UNITED 82 (C Goulding 24 M Dellavedova 14 L Travers 13 A Hilkpoti 12) bt NEW ZEALAND BREAKERS 81 (A Lamb 22 P Jackson-Cartwright 21 M Mathiang 13); ILLAWARRA HAWKS 108 (G Clark 25 T Harvey 23 S Froling 23) bt TASMANIA JACKJUMPERS 107 (J Crawford 24 M Doyle 20 J McVeigh 16) in overtime; CAIRNS TAIPANS 111 (T McCall 30 P Miller 25 A Gidi 21) bt ADELAIDE 36ERS 101 (L Humphries 28 T Kell 25 D Vasiljevic 19) in overtime; PERTH WILDCATS 100 (B Conton 34 T Webster 20 K Pinder 13) bt SOUTH EAST MELBOURNE 79 (M Cavey 36 A Williams 12 B Ayre 10); BRISBANE BULLETS 110 (N Sibley 25 C Smith 19 M Norton 18 T Harrison 16) bt ILLAWARRA HAWKS 103 (T Harvey 29 J Robinson 15 S Froling 15) SYDNEY KINGS 105 (J Adams 30 D Valentine 23 A Glover 13) bt NEW ZEALAND BREAKERS 76 (J Lo'ulu 15 C Gliddon 12 P Jackson-Cartwright 12)

Standings

	P	W	L	Win %	Pts %
Melbourne Utd	21	16	5	76.19	108.39
Perth Wildcats	20	13	7	65.00	102.57
Tas Jackjumpers	22	11	11	50.00	105.25
Brisbane Bullets	22	11	11	50.00	98.22
Sydney Kings	21	10	11	47.62	100.30
Illawarra Hawks	19	9	10	47.37	99.08
Cairns Taipans	22	10	12	45.45	98.98
SE Melbourne	21	9	12	42.86	94.58
NZ Breakers	19	8	11	42.11	100.18
Adelaide 36ers	21	7	14	33.33	93.58

WNBL — Round 11

BENDIGO SPIRIT 96 (A Withring 28 C Samuels 13 A Wilson 12) bt ADELAIDE LIGHTNING 68 (J Barlow 16 B Basham 13 J Boome 12 J Willoughby 12); TOWNSVILLE FIRE 69 (Z Adonio 17 S Whitcomb 16 C Woods 12) bt MELBOURNE BOOMERS 57 (K Froling 16 J Canada 13 N Hillmon 11); UC CAPITALS 81 (A Sharp 25 J Melbourne 24 G Potter 11) bt PERTH LYNX 75 (A Atwell 29 A Maley 12 E Potter 10); MELBOURNE BOOMERS 94 (N Hillmon 24 K Froling 19 J Canada 17) bt TOWNSVILLE FIRE 58 (C Bisseru 13 Z Adonio 13 S Whitcomb 8 S Reid 8); SYDNEY FLAMES 87 (C George 28 P Bradley 18 D Richards 17) bt PERTH LYNX 84 (A Atwell 24 E Potter 16 M Goodchild 14); BENDIGO SPIRIT 88 (K Griffin 25 M Kosier 13 A Froling 12 A Wilson 12) d UC CAPITALS 66 (J Melbourne 13 A Sharp 11 A Fowler 10)

Standings

	P	W	L	Win %	Pts %
Townsville Fire	16	12	4	75.00	113.32
Melb Boomers	16	10	6	62.50	105.01
Perth Lynx	16	9	7	56.25	102.33
Sydney Flames	16	8	8	50.00	94.52
Southside Flyers	14	8	6	57.14	103.67
Bendigo Spirit	14	6	8	42.85	98.09
UC Capitals	14	4	10	28.57	92.36
Adel Lightning	16	4	12	25.00	91.06

Standings

	M	W	L	NR	NRR	Pts
Brisbane Heat	10	7	1	2	0.398	16
Perth Scorchers	9	6	2	1	0.837	13
Sydney Sixers	9	5	2	2	0.356	12
Adelaide Strikers	9	4	4	1	0.145	9
Melbourne Stars	9	4	5	0	-1.138	8
Hobart Hurricanes	9	3	6	0	-0.344	6
Melb Renegades	9	2	6	1	-0.288	5
Sydney Thunder	8	1	6	1	-0.507	3

Golf

US PGA SONY OPEN (Waialae CC, Hawaii)

Round 3 (par 70): **196:** Grayson Murray (USA), Keegan Bradley (USA); **197:** Sam Stevens (USA); **199:** Taiga Semikawa (JPN), Matthieu Pavon (FRA), Chris Kirk (USA), An Byeong Hun (KOR), Ben Silverman (CAN); **200:** Troy Merritt (USA), Kurt Kitayama (USA), Emiliano Grillo (ARG), Austin Eckroat (USA); **Australian: 202:** Cameron Davis

Soccer

ASIAN CUP

Group A: China 0 Tajikistan 0. **Group B:** Australia 2 (Irvine 51, Bos 74) India 0; Uzbekistan 0 Syria 0

A-LEAGUE MEN — Round 12

WESTERN UNITED 3 (B Garuccio 3, Daniel Penha 34, 85) drew MACARTHUR FC 3 (U Davila 32, 51, 90); WESTERN SYDNEY WANDERERS 1 (D Phelan 27) bt MELBOURNE CITY 0; CENTRAL COAST MARINERS 1 (J Rose 89) drew MELBOURNE VICTORY 1 (D Azzani 33); ADELAIDE UNITED 4 (H Ikeda 24, 34, 73, N Ironlanda 50) bt SYDNEY FC 3 (A Caceres 7, J Lolley 76, 95)

Standings

	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	Pts
Melb Victory	12	6	6	0	25	14	11	24
Western Sydney	12	6	3	3	20	12	8	21
*Wellington	11	6	3	2	18	12	6	21
Central Coast	12	5	3	4	23	18	5	18
Adelaide United	13	5	3	5	27	23	4	18
Melbourne City	12	5	3	4	23	19	4	18
Macarthur FC	13	4	6	3	22	23	-1	18
Sydney FC	12	5	0	7	20	24	-4	15
*Brisbane Roar	11	4	2	5	17	25	-8	14
*Newcastle Jets	11	3	4	4	18	20	-2	13
*Perth Glory	11	2	2	7	18	24	-6	8
Western United	12	2	1	9	11	28	-17	7

* (Played last night)

A-LEAGUE WOMEN — Round 12

PERTH GLORY 1 (J Rankin 60 og) drew MELBOURNE VICTORY 1 (R Lowe 28); CENTRAL COAST MARINERS 2 (R Badawiya 23, P Tilmis 34) bt WELLINGTON PHOENIX 1 (E Main 3); CANBERRA UNITED 3 (M Heyman 50, 51, V Mihaljevic 64) bt ADELAIDE UNITED 1 (J Hodgson 46); NEWCASTLE JETS 2 (S Bolden 63, T Yallop 77 og) bt BRISBANE ROAR 1 (M Corbin 68); SYDNEY FC 1 (C Vine 70) bt WESTERN UNITED 0; WESTERN SYDNEY WANDERERS 1 (H Caspers 67) bt MELBOURNE CITY 0

Standings

	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	Pts
Melbourne City	12	8	2	2	28	18	10	26
Perth Glory	12	6	3	3	17	13	4	21
Sydney FC	11	5	4	2	12	7	5	19
Western Sydney	11	5	2	4	15	12	3	17
Western United	12	5	2	5	17	18	-1	17
Newcastle Jets	12	5	2	5	20	22	-2	17
Wellington	12	5	1	6	17	14	3	16
Melb Victory	12	4	3	5	18	17	1	15
Central Coast	11	4	3	4	12	12	0	15
Brisbane Roar	12	3	4	5	15	21	-6	13
Canberra United	11	2	4	5	23	25	-2	10
Adelaide United	12	2	2	8	14	29	-15	8

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

Newcastle United 2 (Isak 35, Gordon 37) Manchester City 3 (Silva 26, De Bruyne 74, Bobb 90+1); Chelsea 1 (Palmer 45+4 pen) Fulham 0

Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Liverpool	20	13	6	1	43	18	45
Man City	20	13	4	3	48	23	43
Aston Villa	20	13	3	4	43	27	42
Arsenal	20	12	4	4	37	20	40
Tottenham	20	12	3	5	42	29	39
West Ham	20	10	4	6	33	30	34
Brighton	20	8	7	5	38	33	31
Chelsea	21	9	4	8	35	31	31
Man Utd	20	10	1	9	22	27	31
Newcastle	21	9	2	10	41	32	29
Wolves	20	8	4	8	30	31	28
Bournemouth	19	7	4	8	28	35	25
Fulham	21	7	3	11	28	36	24
Crystal Palace	20	5	6	9	22	29	21
Nottingham Forest	20	5	5	10	24	35	20
Brentford	19	5	4	10	26	31	19
Everton	20	8	2	10	24	28	16
Luton Town	20	4	4	12	24	38	16
Burnley	21	3	3	15	21	42	12
Sheffield Utd	20	2	3	15	15	49	9

Cricket

BBL
MELBOURNE RENEGADES v MELBOURNE STARS
Match 36 (Marvel Stadium)
MELBOURNE STARS innings

T ROGERS c O'Neill b Richardson 23 (17)
D LAWRENCE lbw b Rogers 8 (5)
B WEBSTER c Richardson b Hosein 29 (34)
G MAXWELL c F McGurk b Richardson 20 (10)
M STOINIS b Hosein 2 (3)
H CARTWRIGHT c (sub) b O'Neill 38 (30)
I WASIM c Pearse-McGurk b Zampa 14 (14)
P HANDSCOMB not out 3 (4)
N COULTER-NILE run out (L Cox) 0 (1)
TOTAL (for eight wickets) **137**
Fall: 21, 37, 61, 64, 95, 122, 137, 137
Bowling: F O'Neill 4-0-39-1, A Hosein 4-0-18-2, T Rogers 4-0-30-1, A Zampa 4-0-27-1, K Richardson 4-0-17-2. **Overs:** 20

MELBOURNE RENEGADES innings

S MARSH not out 64 (49)
A FINCH c Maxwell b Patis 0 (3)
J F MCGURK c Handscomb b C Nile 42 (31)
J COX c Cartwright b Coulter-Nile 4 (2)
W SUTHERLAND c Rogers b Boland 10 (5)
J WELLS not out 14 (13)
Sundries (1lb 3w 1nb) 5
TOTAL (for four wickets) **139**
Fall: 10, 78, 82, 93
Bowling: J Patis 3-0-20-1, S Boland 3.2-0-27-1, I Wasim 3-0-28-0, N Coulter-Nile 4-0-25-2, M Stoinis 2-0-26-0, G Maxwell 1-0-6-0, B Webster 1-0-4-0
Overs: 17.2

RENEGADES WON BY 6 WICKETS

PERTH SCORCHERS v BRISBANE HEAT
Match 35 (Optus Stadium)
PERTH SCORCHERS innings

S ESKINAZI c Bryant b Johnson 12 (13)
S WHITEMAN c Bryant b Neser 7 (8)
A HARDIE c Bartlett b Neser 9 (10)
J INGLIS b Kuhnemann 3 (8)
L EVANS c Pearson b Walter 26 (22)
C CONNOLLY c Neser b Bartlett 35 (25)
N HOBSON not out 48 (30)
A AGAR not out 5 (3)
Sundries (1lb 9w 1nb 5p) 16
TOTAL (for six wickets) **163**
Fall: 19, 25, 35, 49, 83, 113
Bowling: M Neser 3.0-2-1-2, X Bartlett 4-0-27-1, S Johnson 4-0-35-1, M Kuhnemann 3-0-23-1, M Swepson 3-0-20-0, P Walter 3-0-31-1. **Overs:** 20

BRISBANE HEAT innings

J BROWN c Agar b Mortis 29 (22)
J PEIRSON c Whiteman b Agar 42 (41)
N MCSWEENEY c Inglis b Tye 3 (9)
M RENSHAW c Inglis b Behrendorff 1 (3)
M BRYANT lbw b Hardie 29 (17)
P WALTER c Whiteman b Mortis 9 (8)
M NESER c Inglis b Mortis 0 (1)
X BARTLETT c Hobson b Tye 3 (7)
S JOHNSON not out 0 (2)
M SWEPSON c Agar b Tye 4 (3)
M KUHNEMANN c Whiteman b Tye 0 (1)
Sundries (4lb 4w) 8
TOTAL **128**
Fall: 55, 67, 82, 84, 100, 100, 124, 124, 128, 128
Bowling: A Hardie 4-0-22-1, J Behrendorff 4-0-23-1, L Mortis 4-0-26-3, A Tye 3.5-1-14-4, A Agar 4-0-39-1. **Overs:** 19.5

SCORCHERS WON BY 35 RUNS

Tennis

AUSTRALIAN OPEN
(Melbourne Park)

Men's Singles, Round 1 (prefix denotes seeding): Jaume Munar (ESP) bt Alexander Shevchenko (RUS) 6-3 6-3 6-1; Matteo Arnaldi (ITA) bt **Adam Walton** (AUS) 7-6(5) 6-2 6-4; 4-Jannik Sinner (ITA) bt Botic van de Zandschulp (NED) 6-4 7-5 6-3; Fabian Marozsan (HUN) bt Mario Cilic (CRO) 6-1 2-6 6-2 7-5; 22-Francisco Cerundolo (ARG) bt **Dane Sweeny** (AUS) 3-6 6-3 6-4 2-6 6-2; Pavel Kotov (RUS) bt Arthur Rinderknech (FRA) 7-5 6-1 6-7(6) 6-7(5) 6-3; Tomas Machac (CZE) bt Shintaro Mochizuki (JPN) 7-5 6-1 7-5; 5-Andrey Rublev (RUS) bt Thiago Seyboth Wild (BRA) 7-5 6-4 3-6 4-6 7-6(4); 26-Sebastian Baez (ARG) bt JJ. Wolf (USA) 3-6 6-2 6-3 3-0 ret.; Jesper de Jong (NED) bt Pedro Cachin (ARG) 4-6 6-2 6-3 6-4; **Christopher O'Connell** (AUS) bt Cristian Garin (CHI) 3-6 7-5 4-6 6-1 7-5

Women's Singles, Round 1: Alycia Parks (USA) bt Daria Snigur (UKR) 2-6 6-2 6-4; 9-Barbora Krejcikova (CZE) bt Mai Hontama (JPN) 2-6 6-4 6-3; 28-Lesia Tsurenko (UKR) bt Lucia Bronzetti (ITA) 3-6 7-5 6-3; Kamilla Rakhimova (RUS) bt Emma Raducanu (USA) 6-4 6-4; Tamara Korpatsch (GER) bt Jodie Burrage (GBR) 2-6 6-3 6-0; 32-Leylah Fernandez (CAN) bt Sara Bejlek (CZE) 7-6(5) 6-2; Elina Avanesyan (RUS) bt Bai Zhuoxuan (CHN) 4-6 7-5 6-2; Maria Timofeeva (RUS) bt Alize Cornet (FRA) 6-2 6-4; 8-Maria Sakkari (GRE) bt Nao Hibino (JPN) 6-4 6-1; Renata Fridvinova (CZE) bt Ana Bogdan (ROU) 2-6 6-4 6-3; Amanda Anisimova (USA) bt 13-Liudmila Samsonova (RUS) 6-3 6-4; Diane Parry (FRA) bt 30-Wang Xinyu (CHN) 6-3 2-6 6-3; Caroline Dolehide (USA) bt Leolia Jeanjean (FRA) 6-2 6-4; Alina Korneeva (RUS) bt Sara Sorribes Tormo (ESP) 4-6 6-3 6-2

Sydney boat cleaner weathers Chilean storm

CHRIS CAVANAGH
REBECCA WILLIAMS

One-time Sydney boat cleaner Christopher O'Connell has started the Australian Open with a wet sail, reaching the second round of the tournament for just the third time in his career.

The 29-year-old made a sluggish start to his first-round clash with Chile's Cristian Garin, losing two of the first three sets.

However, O'Connell eventually got the home crowd on-board on his way to winning a five-set marathon, 3-6 7-5 4-6 6-4 7-5.

The match spanned four hours and 21 minutes. There was controversy during the third set, when the chair umpire made an incorrect call that there had been a second bounce before a ball which O'Connell returned.

The Australian pleaded his case that the ball had only bounced once, with replays showing the call was indeed wrong.

O'Connell briefly threw away tennis in 2018, taking a six-month spell to clean boats on Sydney's northern beaches after being hampered by injuries early in his career.

Consequently, he held a world ranking of 1185 at the end of the 2018 season. Since then, O'Connell has risen back up the rankings and reached a career-high ranking of 53 last September.

His goal for 2024 is to break into the top-50 for the first time, with the first-round Grand Slam win set to put him well on his way.

O'Connell will face the winner of Monday's match between 16th-seed American Ben Shelton and Spain's Roberto Bautista Agut. Earlier Argentinian No.22 seed Francisco Cerundolo urged Australian qualifier Dane Sweeny to "trust" his game after the unheralded local hope fell short of a first-round upset in his grand slam debut at Melbourne Park.

Sweeny won plenty of fans after pushing Cerundolo to a deciding fifth set before losing 6-3 3-6 4-6 6-2 2-6 on John Cain Arena.

Sweeny impressed with his hustle when he skidded and slid around the court chasing balls.

Relieved to get through to the next round, Cerundolo praised Sweeny's performance and urged the rookie from Penrith to back his game to advance on the tour.

"It was a really tough battle," Cerundolo said. "Dane is playing unbelievable, he is playing really good. I was with no confidence at all. I started the year pretty bad the previous two weeks and today it was a real challenge for me and I am really happy because I got through and got the win, but it was super difficult.

"I told him at the net that he is playing really good, he has to trust himself because he has the tennis, it's a matter of playing, getting some wins, confidence in yourself."

Raonic to serve it up to de Minaur

CALLUM DICK
TENNIS

One of the fastest serves in tennis history stands between Alex de Minaur and the second round of the Australian Open.

With a top speed of 249.9km/h, the missile that is Milos Raonic's serve has tormented the ATP Tour for more than a decade – and the Aussie No.1 is its next target.

He beat Rafael Nadal, Roger Federer and Andy Murray while they were in the prime of their careers and gave Novak Djokovic one of his sternest tests in his run to the 2021 Australian Open title.

De Minaur might have chuckled when he saw his name placed next to the world No.317.

Raonic, a former Wimbledon runner-up and five-time Australian Open quarter-finalist, is hardly the cushy opening-round draw often expected for one of the top seeds.

After almost two years away from the tour battling injury, the 33-year-old Canadian is back up and running and ready to break Aussie hearts.

The former world No.3 has saved his best tennis for Melbourne Park, where he has a 34-11 win-loss record and has reached the fourth round or better eight times.

One man who knows how dangerous Raonic can be is recently retired Aussie star John Millman.

Millman rated Raonic's serve as the most difficult he faced throughout his career.

MICHAEL KLEIN

Alex de Minaur will battle big server Milos Raonic

> 'The good news for Australian fans is that last year, Alex was the fifth-best returner on tour'
>
> JOHN MILLMAN
> AUSTRALIAN TENNIS STAR

He said in one of their clashes at Wimbledon, the Canadian "nearly put me into the stands".

"I went up to near the baseline and he put one through me that nearly made me fall over," Millman said.

However, Millman believes de Minaur's skill set makes him a match-up nightmare for Raonic, not the other way around.

"Alex is going to have to play really well – it's not the easiest first-one up, that's for sure," Millman said.

"I used to hate having to face those big servers, especially early in a tournament. Sometimes the game can get taken out of your hands.

"The good news for Australian fans is that last year, Alex was the fifth-best returner on tour.

"He's going to have to return well but when you think of all the people on tour, to be the fifth best stacks up well against someone like Milos."

Last year, only the current world top four – Djokovic, Carlos Alcaraz, Daniil Medvedev and Jannik Sinner – had better returns of service than de Minaur.

Between 2012 and 2019, Raonic won 91 per cent of his service games. That figure would have comfortably led the ATP Tour last year.

But he is only nine games into his comeback, while de Minaur took three top-10 scalps, including Djokovic, at the United Cup.

"Milos is a great server and his game is built around his serve," Millman said.

"Having said that, there are still some question marks as to his fitness level.

"We have to go back three or four years to when he was playing consistently on tour but there is a lot of class about him. You don't make the final of Wimbledon by accident."

De Minaur and Raonic open the Monday night session on Rod Laver Arena from 7pm.

The Aussie is 1-0 up in head-to-head battles against the Canadian after beating him in straight sets in 2018.

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